THRILLING wonder STORIES

DECEMBER 25¢

FEATURING
THE CAPHIAN CAPER
By Kendell Foster Crossen

SCIENCE FICTION BY TOP WRITERS

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

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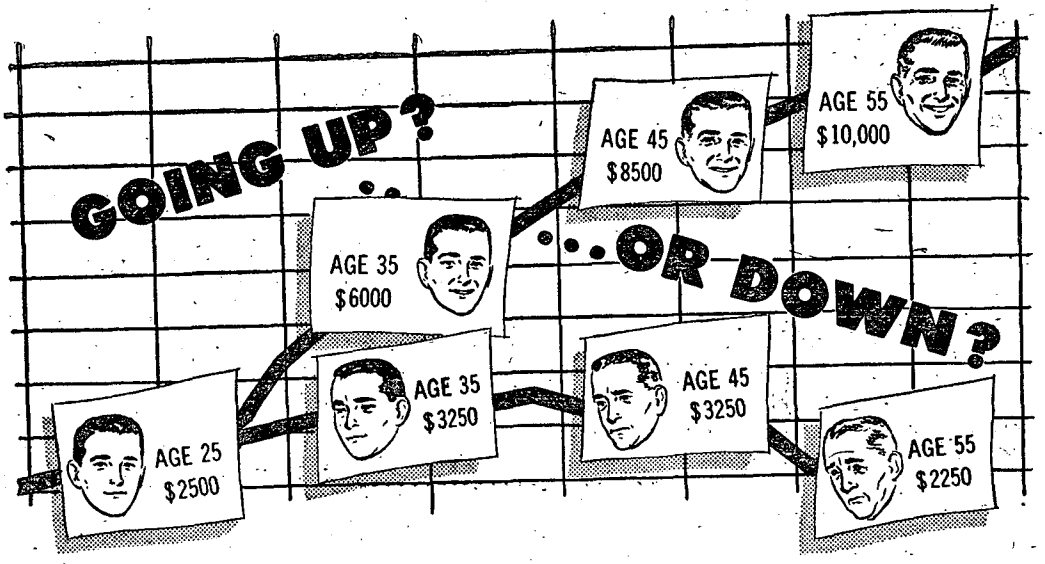

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THRILLING
WONDER STORIES

VOL. XLI, NO. 2 A THRILLING PUBLICATION DECEMBER, 1952

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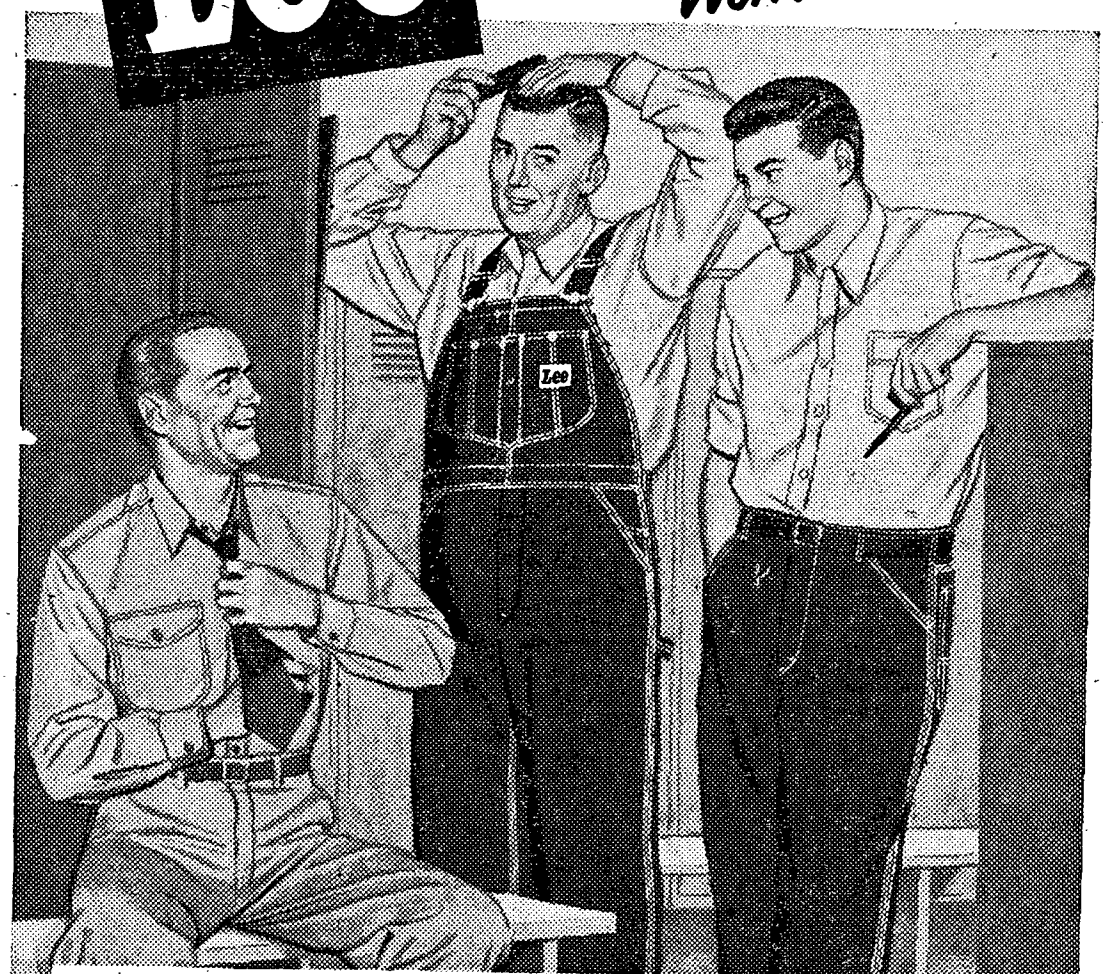

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A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

Our guest editorialist for this issue, Judy Merril, is known to science fiction devotees under her own name and under the composite name of Cyril Judd, which signifies a collaboration with C. M. Kornbluth.

Under her own name she has written a novel, SHADOW ON THE HEARTH, published in 1950 by Doubleday, an anthology, SHOT IN THE DARK, published in 1950, and has a new anthology, BEYOND HUMAN KEN, scheduled by Random House for 1952. In addition she has sold short stories to the entire field, only one of which has ever failed to be anthologized.

In collaboration with Kornbluth she has written MARS CHILD, which is being published in hard covers by Abelard Press under the title OUTPOST MARS, and GUNNER CADE, to appear in book form in 1952 under the Simon & Schuster imprint.

Delving even further back, Judy has been a fan, has even edited a fanzine. Began writing pulp fiction for a living in 1947 and did westerns, sports and detective stories. She is currently working on a new short stf novel, DAUGHTERS OF EARTH.

DOES your science-fiction story taste different lately?

Is the flat familiar stale taste disappearing? Have you noticed a new tingling sensation in the area of your brain? Do you suffer from discomfort in your social thinking? Dislocation of perspective?

There's a reason. Its name is Synthesis, and sci-fic is its prophet.

It was just about twenty years ago that s-f became a popular field of modern literature. "Popular" in the sense that it could be sold at a low price, in magazine form, to the general reading public. The early magazines were tremendously exciting, not so much for the quality of their fiction (which was frequently appalling), but for the extravagant display of ideas: new concepts, new directions, speculation, extrapolation, sheer hunch and guesswork, and an astonishing amount of accurate prognostication in the fields of the physical sciences.

Within those sciences, a parallel excitement was growing. In those twenty years, man has mastered a basic understanding of the structure of matter . . . mastered it sufficiently to be able to create new forms of matter almost at will.

The Wonderful Post-War World lacks much of what it promised so freely; but one promise at least was kept. For the first time in history, mankind is creating his own physical environment. And in doing so, he is creating, as well, a host of problems that never existed before.

Today's New Need

There is a new need now. You will find it reflected not only in the growing popularity of science-fiction as a field, but even more sharply focussed in the *kind* of science fiction that is being written . . . and re-reflected, also, in the quality of the fiction itself.

We are, literally and actually, building ourselves a new world to live in: We are using coal-products for ladies' stockings and to pave roads; we are using milk-products to paint walls, and at the same time synthesizing vitamins and amino acids to feed those for whom there is no milk; we are furiously exhausting the world's natural resources, and just as rapidly dreaming up a thousand and a hundred thousand new methods of *building* what we need from the atom up.

Under these circumstances, the old rules of

(Continued on page 128)

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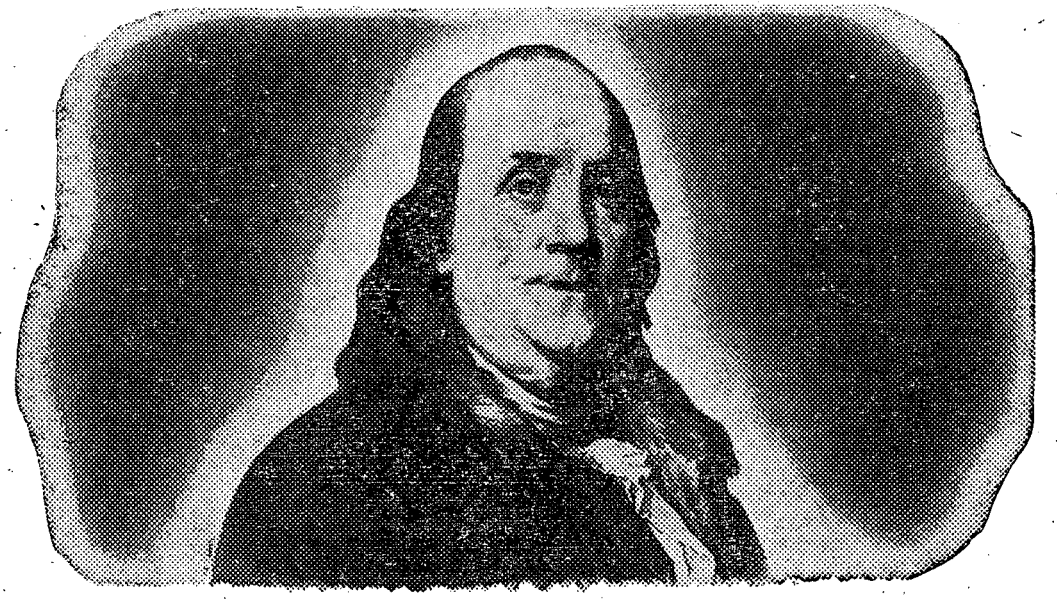
WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

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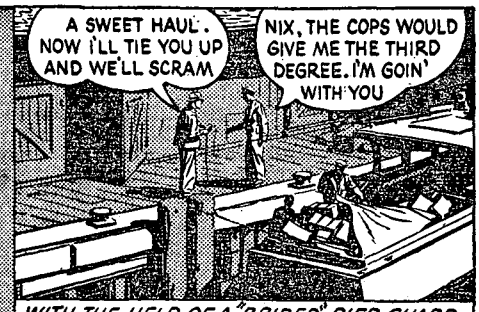
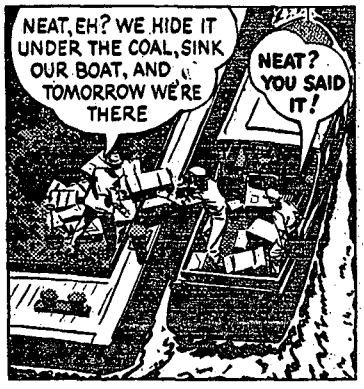
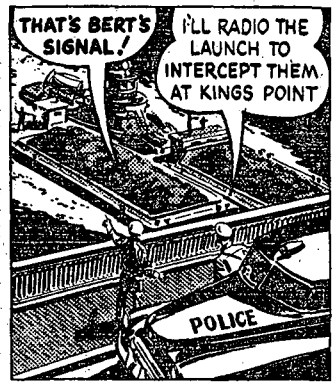


WITH THE HELP OF A "BRIBED" PIER GUARD, THE RIVER PIRATES PREPARE TO MAKE OFF WITH A PRIZE HAUL...





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What's New in Science?

FLUORINE IS ABOUT the nearest thing to a universal solvent that we have. Glass, metals, asbestos vanish in flame, smoke and ashes when exposed to it. The newest field in chemistry is that of fluorocarbons—compounds of carbon and fluorine. Already research in this new field indicates that much in our daily life will be transformed. Seemingly, when these magic materials come into use, you will need to paint your house and oil your engine and press your pants only once in a lifetime!

FORTY-FIVE BRAVE STUDENTS at the University of Rochester volunteered to give themselves toothaches, in a study of pain in teeth by Dr. Paul Swartz of Hobart College, Geneva, N. Y. The students applied electric currents to amalgam fillings in their teeth, then increased the current until they couldn't stand the pain any longer. (Dr. Swartz should have tried hot cookies with currant fillings . . . ouch!)

THE NEWEST IN TOOTHBRUSHES is an electric one that delivers 120 strokes per second. It comes furnished with interchangeable brushes, so that one motor can be used for the whole family.

ONE CUBIC FOOT of "smog" will diffuse into an area of a million cubic feet in as short a time as two hours, according to experiments at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology. Tagged with fluorescent pigments and released from a glass flask, the gas expands a million times before it has gone ten miles. The experiment, observed from airplanes, is expected to aid in forecasting smog.

HOW CAN A SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENTER know that the result of his experiment is not due to chance alone? The answer is that he never can be absolutely sure. No one can guarantee that the next time you set a teakettle on the fire it will not freeze instead of boil! . . . which is why scientists are interesting themselves in the mathematics of gambling and the theory of probabilities. They play it safe. There must be fewer than five in a hundred chances of a result being due to chance, before they are willing to accept any experiment as proven!

GAMBLERS, BY THE WAY, have been divided into four types by a University of Chicago scientist, Mr. H. D. Landal, as reported in the Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics. Roughly, they can be divided into: (a) the take-a-chance type, who will bet with heavy odds against him, if the prize is big enough; (b) the poker-player type — coldblooded, balances odds and risks; (c) the thrill type — just likes to gamble, plays slot machines and one-armed bandits; (d) the sure-thing type. No thrills—bets only when the odds are with him.

THE JOURNAL OF ATMOSPHERIC AND TERRESTRIAL PHYSICS suggests using sound waves, pitched too low for the human ear to hear, to gain information about conditions in the upper atmosphere. The waves would go as high as 100 miles, bounce back from the ionosphere and be picked up by special instruments. Changes in the sound waves would indicate the temperature and pressure at different levels.

—Lewis Island

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the caphian

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caper

a novel by **KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN**

Interstellar insurance ace Manning Draco and his arch-foe Dzanku play a life-and-death game of words—on a planet where time misbehaves!

I

MANNING DRACO, whose interest in females was as varied as it was fleeting, had, with dishonorable intent, pursued Lhana Xano for almost a year. The Martian female was the receptionist in the Nuyork office of the Greater Solarian Insurance Company, Monopolated, for which Manning Draco was chief investigator. She was an attractive dish, unless one was limited to the attractions of human females. Manning Draco had no such limitations. For the better of part of a year, he had taken her to lunches and dinners, danced with her, held hands in the visitheatres, and

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made passes whenever he could. In the vernacular of the day, he'd never gotten to the first space platform. But he had hopes—or, to be more exact, he had had hopes until that day, just before the annual Festival of Planets in the Spring of 3473, when Lhana Xano announced that she was returning to Mars to marry a whelphood sweetheart.

Not that Manning Draco was in love with her. He would have been the first to admit that his interest was purely biological. For years he had taken his physical pleasures where he found them, playing a human version of the cowbird, and Lhana's resistance had become a personal challenge. By going home to be married she was removing all opportunity of turning her challenge into a victory. It wounded his vanity, destroyed his faith in women, and made him feel old at thirty.

This was the mood in which he went to the opening night of the Festival.

The Festival of the Planets was held in Nuyork each Spring on the anniversary of the forming of the first planetary union. That even had followed what historians called the Seven Hundred Years War, and the first year there had been a spontaneous street celebration in which Terrans, Martians, Venusians, and Vegans had danced together and shouted with joy. Thereafter, it had become an annual affair. It was always held on the first Friday in May and lasted through Sunday. Second level streets in Nuyork were cleared of all traffic and turned over to the revelers. There were street musicians and thousands of little stands dispensing the confections of a hundred planets. Nearly everyone dressed in costumes and for three days they played without restraint.

Manning Draco went to the Festival merely to be surrounded by noise and unfamiliar faces. He wore no costume and had no hope of enjoying himself. He parked his air-car on the fourth level and descended glumly to the second level.

He stopped at one of the first booths and bought on Alnilam Fire-Ice*—which has been described by one writer on viands as "part Alnilam frozen rum, part pineapple-lime ice, and part pure explosion." He walked along with the crowd, spooning the Fire-Ice into his mouth.

Manning was edging his way around a group of street dancers when he felt someone grab his arm. He looked around, in no mood for company—and changed his mind.

She was just tall enough to come up to his shoulder. She was in a Festival costume—or, rather, out of it, for she was dressed as an Algenibian court favorite. A jeweled belt girdled her waist. From it, in front and in back, scarlet silk fell to her ankles, the inner edges being sealed to the inside of her legs. A loop of scarlet silk curved from her shoulders, with a single brilliant jewel knotting it between her breasts. She wore a scarlet half-mask over the upper half of her face. There were tiny bells on the toes of her scarlet crescent-slippers.

She was Terran, with a beauty that was breath-taking. Her body was perfection, and the costume made it obvious that she was using none of the pneumatic beauty-aids so common among fashionable Terran women. Her skin had the coloring of old ivory and her long hair was blue-black.

"Hello, Manning Draco," she said, thrusting her arm through his.

HE WAS flattered at being recognized. He peered closer at her masked face and was certain that he'd never met her. His pulse quickened. Perhaps, he thought, this was a better answer. Her arms would provide the solace he needed.

"Hello," he said. "Do I know you?"

"No," she answered. "But I know you. I've known you for years."

* Alistair Dhu, author of *Drinking Your Way Through the Galaxy*, is believed responsible for the saying: "Terran brandy for children, Rigelian Jodiper-Whiskey for men, and Alnilam Fire-Ice for heroes."

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"Then you must have started while still a child, for you're not much more than that now—but enough more," he aded, glancing at the loop of silk. "What's your name, honey?"

She shook her head. "You may call me Vega, but that is all," she said. She tugged on his arm. "Come."

This was his first surprise. He'd expected her to lead him away from the throng, to a private apartment. Instead she was tugging him to join the dancers. Shrugging, he followed her.

His second surprise was that he enjoyed dancing with her. Soon he found himself doing things that he hadn't done in ten years. They threw confetti from the first evening. They danced and played games, drank and laughed, and the night was filled with pleasure. Again there was a brief parting kiss and a promise to meet the following night as she left in an air-cab. For the first time in his life, Manning Draco was willing to admit that he might be feeling the beginning of love.

The last night of the Festival was like the first two, but, it seemed to Manning, even more fun. It was almost five o'clock in the morning when they climbed to the fourth level, scorning the Level-Converters, and hailed an air-cab for her.

"This is the last night," he said. "Why not let me take you home?"

That Manning's Here Again!

ACCORDING to old know-it-all Webster, a caper is a "romp" or "frolic," as in "mirth or dancing." In reading this new misadventure of the ubiquitous Manning Draco, you should therefore be prepared for a certain portion of merriment. The laughter, however, will be yours, not Draco's, for in tangling with his formidable nemesis, Dzanku, even our competent Mr. Draco has been known to break out in a cold sweat. But for some reason, the deeper he is involved in trouble the more his audience seems to enjoy it, which is unfeeling of them, but doubtless human.

Aside from meeting some very queer creatures on the planet Caph II, Manning has a rather serious fracture of his cherished bachelorhood. Read 'em and see.

—The Editor

the parapets of the second level; they raced hand in hand in pursuit of a mad parade led by a giant Alpheratzian; they ate wild love-fruit from Spica and drank the spiced wines of Polaris. He found himself laughing as much as the girl, throwing himself into the Festival spirit in a way he would have scorned a few hours earlier.

At four in the morning he said goodbye to her, having had no more for his pains than a light kiss a few seconds before she climbed into an air-cab. But he had no feeling of failure, and she had promised to meet him the following night.

Saturday night was a repetition of

"No, Manning," she said softly. "I'd like you to, but it's best this way. It's been a wonderful Festival. I wouldn't want it to be spoiled."

"Me, neither," Manning said. Then a horrible thought struck him. "Don't tell me you're married!"

She laughed. "No."

Just then the air-cab settled down beside them. She climbed in, rolled down the rear window.

"At least, tell me your name," Manning said. "I have to see you again."

"Maybe you'll change your mind when you know who I am," she said.

"Not a chance."

She spoke to the driver and the air-

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cab lifted slowly from the street. She leaned through the open window, looked down at him.

"It's Vega Cruikshank," she said. "Good night, Manning."

The air-cab shot upward and was soon out of sight.

She was gone by the time Manning got it. He didn't believe in coincidences. He knew only one other Cruikshank. Therefore, he reasoned, she must be the daughter of J. Barnaby Cruikshank, president and owner of the Greater Solarian Insurance Company, Monopolated. He could well imagine J. Barnaby's reaction when he learned that Manning Draco was interested in his daughter. He shrugged and went home.

IT WAS almost ten the following morning when Manning Draco strolled in the Greater Solarian offices. Before he could reach his own office, the mousey creature* who had replaced Lhana Xano at the reception desk told him that J. Barnaby wanted to see him.

Outside the private office of the president, Manning waited until the door-scanner recognized him and the door opened. He stepped inside and faced the head of the monopoly.

At forty-one J. Barnaby Cruikshank was one of the most influential individuals in the galaxy. He had originally inherited the insurance company from his grandfather, Horace Greeley Cruikshank, but up until the time J. Barnaby took over it had been a small company limiting its policies to humans. J. Barnaby had immediately started issuing policies covering all sorts of dominant life on all planets. He had also been active in politics and when the Monopolistic Era began, J. Barnaby obtained an intergalactic monopoly charter and the company had prospered.

Nearly everything was a crisis for J. Barnaby Cruikshank. To some degree this was legitimate, stemming from the day he had hired Dzanku Dzanku, a Rigelian, and Sam Warren, a Terran, to sell insurance. They had accounted for almost half the policies issued by Greater Solarian; but Dzanku and Warren were also two of the slickest confidence men in the galaxy, and prosperity and trouble had often gone hand in hand. But Greater Solarian employees were long accustomed to J. Barnaby looking as if disaster had finally won, so Manning Draco paid no attention to his employer's rumpled look.

"About time you got here," J. Barnaby growled.

Manning dropped into the nearest chair and smiled at his boss. "The day is young yet," he murmured. "J. Barnaby, I am displeased with you."

"Oh, you are?" J. Barnaby asked, his voice heavy with sarcasm.

"Yes. I have discovered that you are the father of one of the most beautiful girls my jaded old eyes have ever beheld and you have studiously kept this a secret from me. This is definitely a case of unfair employment practice."

J. Barnaby Cruikshank looked as if he were about to have a stroke. As Manning finished, his face slowly reddened until it achieved a royal purple. With a visible effort, he got a grip on himself.

"You," he said with controlled rage, "have the morals of a Kochabian sex dervish. If you try to get within twenty miles of my daughter, I'll make you sorry you were born."

"I've already been closer to her than twenty miles," Manning said.

"I know," J. Barnaby said grimly. "I had a talk with Vega when she came home this morning. She admitted she'd been seeing you during the Festival. I've already given her to understand that she's never to see you again. In fact, I'm arranging for her to leave tonight for a cruise around the galaxy."

"What did Vega say to that?"

"She said," snorted J. Barnaby, "that she'd love you no matter where I sent her. But she'll get over that."

"The girl has good taste," Manning

* An apt adjective since the new receptionist came from Al Suhail IV where the dominant race is definitely related to the Terran order *Cricetinae*, genus *Peromyscus*.

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murmured. "Must have inherited it from her mother."

J. BARNABY glared at him. "In fact, I was also intending to invent a case which would take you to the other end of the galaxy. That, however, if no longer necessary."

"Meaning?"

"There *is* a case—probably the most important case we've ever had." His tone suddenly changed; it became almost wheedling. "Manning, my boy, the fate of Greater Solarian is in your hands."

"Again?" Manning murmured. "In that case, don't you think you should look more kindly upon my interest in your daughter?"

This produced another struggle within J. Barnaby. Urbanity won. "Manning," he said, "you know I look upon you as a son. If I weren't so worried, perhaps I might have felt differently about the news. Suppose we discuss it when you return from this case? Isn't that fair, my boy?"

Manning grinned. "You," he said, imitating J. Barnaby's tone, "have the morals of a space pirate. What is this case that's making you jet-happy?"

"That's my boy!" J. Barnaby said happily. The happiness quickly faded from his face. "The truth of the matter, Manning, is that I am facing the possibility of being put out of business."

"I don't believe it," Manning said. "You've one of the most successful companies in the galaxy."

"That is true." This was a rare admission for J. Barnaby to make to one of his employees. "But my statement is also true. A claim has just been filed against us with the Committee on Extra-Planetary Affairs for one trillion credits. As of Friday, our financial statement shows that Greater Solarian has assets totaling one trillion, five hundred and twenty-one million, nine hundred and forty-two thousand, seven hundred and eleven credits and thirteen units."

"Remind me to ask for a raise," Manning said.

"If this claim goes through, you won't even have a job. Our cash reserves amount to only five hundred billion credits and thirteen units. That's only half the amount of the claim. If we're forced to liquidate the rest of our assets quickly, I doubt if they will bring more than another five hundred billion credits. We'd be wiped out."

"You'd still have thirteen units," Manning pointed out. "Enough to buy two good cigars."

J. BARNABY ignored him. "On the surface, there are no grounds for us to contest the claim. Unless you can find some evidence to make a settlement, we'll have to pay the full face of the policies in thirty days."

"Dzanku and Warren," Manning guessed.

J. Barnaby winced as he nodded. "They sold the policies on Caph II."

Manning could remember nothing about the Caph system. He said as much.

"There isn't much to remember," J. Barnaby said glumly. "There are two planets in a single orbit around Caph. A Federation investigator made a brief visit there fifty years ago and classified both planets as Class G, inhabited by semi-humanoids. Telemeter tests were made, but mineral showings were slight. Theoretically, limited trade is permitted with Class G planets subject to the Committee's approval. A year ago Dzanku and Warren went to Caph II and sold one hundred million twenty-year-endowment policies. The premiums were—ah—slightly higher than usual, so I accepted them without an investigation. The Committee on Inter-Planetary Affairs approved."

"Naturally," Manning said dryly. "You probably slipped them a cut. How much higher were the premiums than normally?"

"About twice," J. Barnaby admitted. "Each policy holder paid for one year in advance. It seemed too good to miss."

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"Even so," Manning said, frowning, "why are you stuck now? Didn't you say the policies were twenty-year-endowment?"

J. Barnaby looked unhappy. "Yes. Each policy called for the payment of ten thousand credits in twenty years. They were sold just a year ago. Last week the Federation made a new survey of Caph II. It seems the system exists in what is known as a Time-Fracture. While one year passes in the rest of the galaxy, twenty years pass on Caph II."*

"You mean," Manning asked, "that the policies were sold there a year ago by our time, but that it's already been twenty years on Caph II and so the pay-off is legally due?"

J. Barnaby Cruikshank nodded.

Manning Draco laughed until the tears streaked down his face.

J. Barnaby watched malevolently.

"It's the funniest thing I've heard in years," Manning said finally. "If I have to lose my job, I can't imagine a more enjoyable way."

Meaning you won't even try to do anything about it?" J. Barnaby demanded.

"Oh, I'll try. I'll give my all for dear Old Greater Solarian. But what do you expect me to do? Surely you don't have any idea that I can find some way of cancelling a hundred million policies so it won't cost you a cent?"

"No," J. Barnaby admitted reluctantly, "but you should be able to find some loophole which will let us get away with a settlement for part of the face value."

"That'll mean a quick settlement. You'll have to give me sight drafts."

"I will. You'll be authorized to settle for any amount up to fifty per cent of the face value." J. Barnaby peered suspiciously at his chief investigator. "That means up to the full amount of our cash reserves, but don't go to getting careless with my money."

"If you're worried," Manning said, "you can always go yourself. I'll be glad to stay here and look after things."

"No, no," J. Barnaby said hurriedly. "I trust you, my boy. I merely meant that I didn't want you to rush things on this job. Take your time."

"Okay," Manning said. "Where are the papers?"

"Here they are. I've also arranged for the spaceport to have your ship ready. Have a nice trip, my boy."

"Sure. Tell Vega I'll see her when I

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* For the benefit of those interested in the mechanics of Caph time as related to the rest of the galaxy, we offer the explanation of Vladimir Q. Fignewton, the Federation astrophysicist. Since we are dealing with time coordinates, as well as spatial coordinates, we shall denote the time of the event "now" by O. Thus t = O denotes that the time of the event is now in terms of Terra and the rest of the galaxy, and in a similar manner that the event takes place "here" by O. But in referring to Caph II, we would say that t = O × 20. In other words, on Caph II, the past has negative × 20 (N × 20) time coordinates, the present has zero × 20 (Z × 20) time coordinates, and the future has positive × 20 (P × 20) time coordinates. Now to explain the Caphian Time-Fracture: We find that Caph (the sun) (whose mass is M) exerts a pull on Caph II (sometimes called the planet Opt) with a force

$$f = M \cdot \frac{4rr^2K}{R^2}$$

(here K depends on the nature of Caph II, and R is the radius of the orbit of Caph-II.) Since neither Caph II nor its sun fall on one another, we may assume that the two forces f and F are equal,

or $$M \cdot \frac{4rr^2k}{R^2} = m \cdot \frac{4rr^2K}{R^2}$$

$$Mk = mK$$

From this we have $$\frac{K}{M} = \frac{k}{m}$$

which signifies that these ratios are the same for Caph as for Caph II. Let us denote the ratio

$$\frac{K(}{M(} \text{ or } \frac{k)}{m)} \text{ by } \frac{c}{4rr^2}$$

We have then $$\frac{K}{M} = \frac{c}{4rr^2}, \text{ or } 4rr^2K = cM$$

and

$$\frac{k}{m} = \frac{c}{4rr^2}, \text{ or } 4rr^2k = cm.$$

Then the expression

$$f = M \cdot \frac{4rr^2 k}{R^2}$$

after $4rr^2k$ is replaced by cm, becomes

$$f = c\,\frac{(mM)}{(R^2)}$$

This expression is the mathematical statement of Fignewton's law of general Time-Fracture. The more mathematically-alert readers will instantly notice that the Z x 20 coordinates appear nowhere in the Fignewton Law. This is because Fignewton has proved that the event cannot possibly take place "here" by O (ref. the beginning of this footnote) since due to the Time-Fracture Caph II is neither "here" nor "there"; therefore, postulates Fignewton, the Z x 20 coordinates have no place in any theory which attempts to prove the existence of the Time-Fracture. This has led certain short-sighted critics to label the Fignewton Law "The Theory of the Excluded O." In rebuttal, however, it should be noted that Fignewton's assertion can be proved by

$$s = \frac{v^2 \sin 2A}$$

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get back." Manning laughed at J. Barnaby's struggle to keep the smile on his face. He waved and left.

II

AT THE spaceport, his ship, the *Alpha Actuary,* was already on the launching rack. Since she was always kept fully stocked and supplied, all he had to do was get in and leave. He stepped in through the airlock, then hesitated.

A tiny light was gleaming on the instrument panel.

Manning Draco stepped to the panel and seemed to be checking the instruments. Actually, he was using a small built-in telemeter. When he read the results, he grinned. He twitched on his port microphone.

"*Alpha Actuary* to launching tower," he said. "Delayed takeoff. Five minutes."

"Delayed takeoff granted," said a voice from his loudspeaker.

Manning left the ship and walked briskly toward the main terminal. He returned within the five minutes, humming beneath his breath as he entered the ship. He closed the outer and inner doors of the air-lock and cleared with the tower. Within a minute, his ship was racing up the launching rack.

By the time he was well above the atmosphere of Terra, his ship had worked out the coordinates of Caph II and the position had been fed into the automatic pilot. Manning switched the ship to magnidrive and relaxed.

"All right," he said loudly. "We are beyond the legal limits of Terra . . . you can come out now."

For a moment nothing happened. Then the door to the tiny bathroom slid to one side and Vega Cruikshank stepped out. She was wearing nylene coveralls which did almost as much for her figure as the absence of covering in her Festival costume had accomplished. She looked annoyed. "You're so smart, Manning Draco," she said. "How did you know I was here?"

Manning grinned and pointed to the instrument panel. "The spy ray* told me somebody was aboard. A telemeter analysis gave me enough more to know it was a woman. I guessed it might be you. And hoped."

"You're not angry with me?" she asked.

"Are you kidding?" he said. "It's the best thing that's happened since last Friday night."

SHE went over and kissed him on the forehead. She danced out of reach, laughing, as he tried to slip his arm around her.

"Uh, uh," she said. "I sneaked aboard your ship because I couldn't stand Daddy making like the heavy-handed father. I decided to teach him a lesson."

Manning looked at her. "Was that the only reason?" he asked.

She flushed. "No," she said softly. "But let's leave it this way for a while. I've heard all of Daddy's horrendous tales about your love affairs. It doesn't bother me, but I don't want to be another one in your life. Maybe the fun we had was all the Festival. I wanted to find out."

Okay," Manning said—to his own surprise. "We'll just play it your way, honey."

"I like you, Mr. Draco," she said lightly. "Now tell me all about wherever we're going."

"There's practically nothing to tell you," Manning said. "It's a Class G planet, so it's not a part of the Federation and won't be unless it's reclassified. But all that means in reality is that the planet doesn't have the sort of natural resources or artifacts which we want badly enough to devise legal methods of getting them as cheaply as possible. In spite of that, however, they may be in their own way as highly advanced as we are. Or they may not be. Any classification higher than K does indicate that

* Manning Draco had the spy ray installed after he discovered a stowaway in the ship when he was returning from Pollux.

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the dominant species is highly intelligent, though."

"That's all?"

"Your father mentioned that the Caphians are semi-humanoid, so they're probably evolved from some sort of animal life. There is one other small thing. Their time rate is slightly different than ours. If we stay on Caph II for five months, say, we'll arrive back home to find that we've been gone from there only one week. It would be a convenient spot for philandering husbands."

Veda frowned. "You mean we might be gone only a week, but we'll get five months older in that time?"

Manning laughed. "I don't think it'll work exactly like that*. You're young enough to risk a few months anyway."

"I'm nineteen," she said indignantly.

"Okay," he said, grinning at her. "Now, since you're turning this into some sort of a companionate test, let's see how you do in the galley. It's lunch time."

She made a face at him and went into the tiny galley set in the rear of the ship. As Manning well knew, the supplies on his ship were chosen with an eye on efficiency rather than luxury; but when she served lunch thirty minutes later it might have been something he'd ordered from the menu of the Venusian Palace Hotel in Nuyork.

"Vega, my love," he said when he had cleaned up the last possible crumb, "that was a superb meal. If you're that good in every matrimonial department, I might even consent to marry you."

"Assuming," she said demurely, "that you've demonstrated your own ability as well and *I've* consented to marry you."

He laughed. "There's just one thing I'd like to know, Vega. How did you manage to duplicate Izaran pastry on the supplies I carry?"

"Oh, it was easy," she said airily. She eyed his grin steadily; then broke down and giggled. "In fact, the whole meal was easy. I merely ordered the frozen specialty from Daddy's luncheon club and brought it with me when I came aboard."

"Charging it to J. Barnaby's account, I trust?"

She nodded.

"Smart, too," Manning said. "J. Barnaby should be glad to get rid of you, instead of looking like an exploding star when I mentioned your name."

"It's all right," Manning?"

"Sure, kitten," he said. "Who wants a cook for his best girl? We can always scare up the price of a sandwich—even if we have to borrow it from your father."

Together they carried the dirty dishes into the galley and dumped them into the dry-wash. Then he took her around the small ship, showing her all of its special features. He was justly proud of the *Alpha Actuary*, having designed most of it himself, and she was properly appreciative.

A FEW hours later, the ship flashed out of magnidrive and hovered five hundred miles above Caph II. Manning and Vega bent over the viewing screen and looked at the planet below. Bathed in the bright light of Caph, it looked like a huge spinning ball. Most of what they could see was a deep blue, with here and there patches of pink. The viewing screen magnified considerably, so that they could tell the pink spots were the lakes and rivers. Despite the magnification, however, they could see nothing that resembled a city.

"That's strange," Manning muttered. He went to his communications system and switched it on. He sent out a call to the planet below, but there was no answer. He tried several languages, in addition to Terran, and finally the inter-

* Manning's guess was a good one. As Hansel Pupik later proved, in what is now known as the Third Law of Pupik, the time coordinates of Caph II, Caph I, and the rest of galaxy act upon one another in such a manner that the visitor to Caph II ages according to the time of his point of origin. Thus a visitor from Terra could spend ten months on Caph II and would be only two weeks older since that would be the amount of Terra-Time consumed. The proof of this is so simple anyone can work it out for himself. Take the prime of the Time-Fracture (see Fignewton), multiply by the radical of the spatial coordinates of Caph carried to the n-th power of a and subtract two.

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They got their first glimpse of a Caphia

galactic sound code. There was still no answer.

"Don't tell me this is another Atik," he exclaimed.

"Atik?" Vega asked. "What's that?"

"A star system in Preseus," Manning said. It's probably the dullest planet in the galaxy. Even the Atikans are bored all the time*. But I mentioned it because the Atikans reproduce by transverse fission and during such periods everything is closed, even the spaceport."

He went back to the viewing screen and began an instrument check of the planet. After a moment, he grunted.

"It moves around its sun so that the same side is always toward it," he said. "We're on the light side now, so I guess we'd better try the dark side. Although

* The Atikans reproduce by the simplest form of fission which takes place once a year and lasts about two weeks, all of the race reproducing at the same time. It can be said, therefore, that once a year every Atikan literally falls apart. During that time all business is at a standstill, resulting in the now well-worn joke about the store that is "closed for the duration of the fission season." As to the boredom of the Atikans, many authorities attribute this to the fact that they have never discovered sex. This is probably true, but there was a period in Terran history when Atikans were the favorite heroes of certain fiction for just this reason. As one ardent fan of the time so aptly put it: "Who wants to read a boy-gets-girl story? Everybody knows what happens when he gets her. Who wants a nice action story all loused up with that stuff? Huh?"

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I don't know why anyone would live on the dark side of a planet."

"Maybe it's too hot on this side," Vega suggested.

He shook his head. "I just tested it. The temperature is only seventy-five. According to that, it must be pretty damn cold on the other side."

He sent the ship hurtling toward the other side of the planet. Since they weren't using magnidrive, the trip took almost an hour, when the ship once more stopped and they went to the viewing screen there was nothing to see. They were enveloped in darkness, without even a moon to brighten the surface of the planet below. Manning increased the power of the viewing screen and they could see tiny rows of lights.

"Looks like that might be lights in buildings," Manning said. "Let's see." He went to the communicating set and switched it on. "*Alpha Actuary* to the planet Caph II," he said. "Terran Manning Draco and passenger requesting permission to land."

This time he got an answer. "Okay, chum," a voice said from the loudspeaker. "Bring her in and set her down." The voice spoke excellent Terran, although there was a rather squeaky quality to the voice itself.

"How about a landing beam?" Manning asked.

"No got, sweetheart. You'll have to fly her down by the seat of your pants. Aim for longitude seventy-five, latitude twenty-one. Roger."

His choice of language, Manning noted, was a bit archaic.

MANNING DRACO was a good pilot, although it was not often that he had to demonstrate it. Space flights were all handled by automatic pilots, and practically all launchings and landings were controlled by a launching tower beam. But Manning took the ship down on instruments and landed her exactly where he'd been told to. A scarlet pip flashed on the landing screen as they touched ground.

Vega Cruikshank was still standing by the viewing screen, staring intently into it.

"Still nothing in sight," she said. "Even the tiny lights we could see from above have vanished."

"Maybe they forgot to turn on the field lights," Manning said. He was busy at the instrument panel. He re-checked the contents of the air outside. The variation from Terra was slight. Then he made a temperature check.

"That's funny," he said. "It's seventy-five degrees here, too. By rights, it should be extremely cold . . . well, honey, let's go out and see what we've drawn."

He pressed a button and they stepped to the air-lock as the doors opened. Then they were at the very exit of the ship—and could still see nothing.

They were surrounded by a darkness so complete that it was like a black curtain before their eyes.

"Manning," Vega said, speaking in almost a whisper, "Do—do you think it's all right?"

"Sure, honey," he said softly. He didn't feel as much confidence as he put in his voice. He was certain that Dzanku Dzanku was not there; but it was many months since he'd heard anything about Sam Warren, and this could be a trap. But he didn't want to frighten Vega. "Maybe we've run across a race that has no sight. That would explain it."

"Welcome, Manning Draco," a voice boomed somewhere in front of them. "Welcome to Optville of Opt. We feared that you would not get here in time."

Manning got the last remark, but he ignored it for the moment.

"Where are you?" he asked. "Also, where in hell are the lights?"

"We are most sorry," the same voice said. "We have few visitors from other planets—this is only the fourth visit by Terrans—and we have never installed any exterior lights. But I am right here."

Manning felt his hand grabbed and pumped up and down. The hand in his clasp seemed similar to that of humans, although he got the impression that the

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fingers were unusually long.

"I note," the voice continued, "that your companion is a Terran female. She is most attractive."

"How can he tell?" Vega whispered.

"Maybe they can see in the dark," Manning answered.

"Oh, no," the voice said. "We do have vision, but we cannot see in the dark. We can, however, easily perceive your structures through the emission of high frequency sound, the echoes of which inform us as to the nearness and shape of objects. I believe it is similar to something which you Terrans call sonar."

"Very interesting," Manning said. "Please excuse us a moment. We forgot something." He drew Vega with him back into the ship. He opened a locker in the control room and drew out an energy torch. He also slipped another small object into his pocket. They went back through the air-lock.

"I hope," he said, addressing his remarks to the general darkness, "that you won't mind if we use a light?"

"Not at all," the voice said politely from the darkness.

Manning pressed the switch on the torch and a swath of light fanned out from the ship.

They got their first glimpse of a Caphian.

III

HE STOOD directly in front of them. He was perhaps a little more than five feet in height. His general outlines were humanoid. The hands were shaped like those of a human, although the fingers were elongated and there were small webs between the fingers. His face was small, rather pointed, with a broad nose and tiny eyes. Light brown hair covered most of his face. The most surprising feature were the ears. They stood up from his head like two huge paddles, being fully twice as long as the face.

The Caphian wore the pants and coat of a full dress suit, but these were his only clothing. Beyond him stood a number of other Caphians, all differently attired. There was one wearing an old-fashioned bathing suit. Some wore a pair of pants or a coat, though none wore both. One wore only a vest, while another was attired only in a pair of yellow shoes.

Manning heard Vega suppress a giggle, but he paid no attention. He turned back to the Caphian who stood nearest.

"Thank you for the welcome," he said gravely. "I presume you know my name from the fact that I announced it to your spaceport, but may I know yours?"

"Of course. I am Phyllos Stopter, official welcomer to you, Manning Draco."

"I'm happy to meet you," Manning said. "My companion is Vega Cruikshank."

"We are also welcoming her—although she was not predicted."

"She is a bit unpredictable," Manning said dryly, "but just what do you mean? While you're at it, you might also explain why you were afraid I wouldn't get here in time."

"Of course," Phyllis Stopter said amiably. "Twenty years ago it was predicted that you would come to visit us. It was decreed that twenty years and seven days from the founding of our new government we would hold an election and that you would arrive before the election was held. Today is the seventh day and we were afraid that you might not arrive. But we should have had more faith in the words of our Great Gray Father."

"So it was predicted that I'd come," Manning said slowly. "And what was the name of this Great Gray Father of yours who made this prediction?"

"The Great Gray Father called himself Dzanku Dzanku, before he felt himself called upon to lead us to the true life."

"I thought so," Manning. "Did he make any other predictions?"

"Oh, many. But they will all be reviewed at our election meeting tonight and you can hear them. The Great Gray Father will be there and perhaps

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he will make new predictions."

"I'm afraid he may disappoint you by not being available*," Manning said.

"The Great Gray Father will never disappoint us," the Caphian said firmly. "Now, if you're ready, we will take you to your hotel. As soon as you know where you're to stay, we can go on to the election meeting." He hesitated. "Since your companion was not mentioned in the prediction, we did not make a reservation for her. Will she share your bed or do you wish other arrangements? You will forgive the question . . . the sex habits of you Terrans are strange to me."

"Sometimes they're even strange to us," Manning said with a grin. "Miss Cruikshank would like separate rooms."

"It will be done," the Caphian said. "Come."

PHYLLOS STOPTER, Vega Cruikshank, and Manning Draco walked across the field, with Manning flashing the torch ahead of them. The remaining Caphians walked closely behind them.

After a short walk, they came to a long, wheeled vehicle. The driver's section was entirely open, with the rest of it inclosed. Inside there were a good fifteen seats arranged in a circle. Manning and Vega took seats inside and the Caphians crowded in after them. As the vehicle started, Manning snapped off the torch. He would have preferred leaving it on, but he thought it might bother them at such close range.

"I suppose," he said, "that Dzanku is responsible for the fact that you speak Terran?"

"Oh, yes," Phyllos Stopter said out of the darkness. "The Great Gray Father was kind enough to introduce us to many of the latest things from the rest of the galaxy."

"The clothes, too?"

"Yes. In our ignorance, we never wore clothes until he pointed out to us that it was done everywhere else. So then we ordered the latest fashion. I have noticed that your own clothes are somewhat more elaborate than ours. I suppose fashions do change somewhat in twenty years."

"Somewhat," Manning said, smothering a desire to laugh. "What else did your Great Gray Father palm off on you?"

"We bought a number of something called films which show the way you Terrans run your government and the way you live your everyday lives. Very interesting. We have adopted some of the practices, but not all. There were, of course, the language courses. And any number of small trifles."

"I'll bet," Manning said dryly. "Dzanku was always the one for turning a profit any way he could. Are these the sum total of his blessings?"

"The most important of all was that he showed us the most pleasureable practice of what you call a twenty-year-endowment policy. And, of course, taxes."

"Of course, taxes," Manning said. "You mean that Dzanku also intended to take a cut of your money on the policies?"

"Only the tax of fifty per cent—which we know is an honorable tribute paid to the head of the government in your part of the galaxy. A most fair arrangement, we felt. After all, we each invested only one thousand credits, your money, in order to receive ten thousand credits now. But all of this must seem very ordinary to you since it is done everywhere."

"At least everywhere that Dzanku can find enough suckers," Manning said. "But right now, Phyllos Stopter, I am more interested in you Caphians. I don't believe I've ever encountered any race exactly like yours. I'd like to know more about it."

Manning was genuinely interested, but he also wanted to keep his mind off the fact that the vehicle was apparently

* Manning felt safe in assuming that Dzanku Dzanku was out of circulation for some time to come. It was only four months since he'd arranged for a slave raider to take Dzanku to Andromeda to serve in the Pleasure Camps of that galaxy. Escape is practically impossible from the Camps, so he felt sure that Dzanku would be there for his full five years.

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racing along at a terrific speed, guided only by some primitive form of sonar.

"We know little ourselves," the Caphian confessed. "But according to the Great Gray Father, we are evolved from a race which you on Terra know as the Chiroptera*. I believe that he also mentioned that they are sometimes called bats. A most intelligent race, he said."

"Mmmm," Manning said, hoping it would be taken for an affirmative. "When we arrived, we came out of magnidrive over the bright side of your planet. There was no answer to my signals. Do all you live in the dark?"

"Doesn't everyone?" the Caphian asked in some surprise.

"Only figuratively," Manning said dryly. "I gather that means you do all live on this side of the planet?"

"Yes. I believe we always have. Occasionally, it's true, we go hunting on the bright side. But actually to live there would be . . . quite unthinkable."

"Another thing," Manning said. "I noticed that the temperature here is almost the same as on the other side. Actually, it should be colder."

"I believe there may have been a time when our ancestors liked a colder climate, but for more years than I know we have had underground furnaces heating this side of the planet."

The conversation was stopped from going farther by their arrival at the hotel.

"We were told that you wouldn't mind if we made a reservation for you," Phyllos Stopter said anxiously, "so we did. But if it does disturb you, we will go on and you can pick out a different one when we're away."

"This is fine," Manning said.

Phyllos Stopter and the welcoming committee left, promising to return soon to escort them to the election meeting. The clerk in the hotel showed them to their rooms, which were on the same floor and near to each other.

THE ROOMS weren't bad, despite being far below the better standards of the galaxy. The beds seemed rather crude affairs, but were quite soft and comfortable. Manning left Vega in her room and went on to his own.

Another thing for which he was

* As it was later discovered, the Caphians were evolved from a race closely related to the order, *Chiroptera*, genus *Euderma maculata*, more commonly known on Terra as the Spotted Bat. Physically, however the Caphians had progressed almost as far along the evolutionary scale as we have from our origins. They had completely lost their wings, the only reminder being tiny webbing between their fingers. Their faces still somewhat resembled those of the *Euderma maculata*, but were considerably more refined. The only feature that was relatively unchanged was the huge ears, with the complicated structure known as *antitragi*, or "false ears." The Caphians also shared one trait with their more primitive kind on Terra: As Manning was to discover, they were all especially secretive about where they lived. For hundreds of years, the Spotted Bat on Terra was never traced to its resting place; like the Spotted Bat, the Caphians were also wholly nocturnal.

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thankful was that the interior of the hotel was equipped with lights. They were set in the walls and gave off a very pale glow, but even the dimness was a relief after the solid wall of blackness outside.

There was a passable bath and Manning took a quick shower. Then he used his Glo-Shav, although it was difficult to see properly in the pale light from the walls. He changed clothes and was about to go along to knock on Vega's door when she came to his.

She had changed into a blue semi-evening frock and, if it were possible, looked twice as beautiful as she had in coveralls.

"I know it isn't evening," she said, indicating her dress, "but it's dark enough so we can pretend it is."

Manning found her so attractive he was willing to pretend anything. Especially after she gave him a lingering kiss.

Within a few more minutes there was a knock on the door. When Manning opened the door it was Phyllos Stopter.

"I am most sorry," he said, "but I discover that there was also a prediction concerning the possible lateness of our Great Gray Father. Since he has not yet arrived, the elections will be delayed until he gets here. It should be soon, however."

"I told you he wouldn't be available," Manning said. "I'm sure that you'll be able to hold your elections anyway. In the meantime, I'd like to arrange a meeting with your leaders, or important citizens, to discuss this matter of your insurance policies. You know that I represent the insurance company?"

Phyllos nodded. "Oh, yes. The Great Gray Father said that we would be paid shortly after you came. So we knew that your arrival was a good sign."

"It may not be so good," Manning said. "I want to talk to you about it. Since it is obviously impossible for me to speak to each one of a hundred million policy holders, I'd like to get together with your authorities."

"I am sorry," the Caphian said, "but this is impossible. We cannot discuss it with you at all until the Great Gray Father is here."

"Why?"

"Because it was all predicted and we must not deviate from it. The predictions are sacred."

"But it can't hurt for me to talk with your authorities," Manning persisted.

"It is impossible," the Caphian said firmly. "Even if there weren't the predictions, it would be impossible. We have no authorities. All are elected for twenty years—except, of course, the Great Gray Father who remains our superior—and their terms of office have expired. We will have no authorities until the election is held. Now, I'm sure that you will find everything very comfortable. We will notify you the minute the elections are to be held."

He bowed and quickly left the room.

Manning muttered under his breath, then grinned at Vega. "And there," he said, "you have a good example of the romance of interplanetary existence. Oh, well, we might as well start looking around. Maybe we can pick up something that will give me an advantage when these characters finally get around to admitting that Dzanku isn't coming. Let's do the town, honey."

IV

MANNING DRACO soon found that his thought had been overly optimistic. Nowhere in the large city of Optville could they find a single individual who would talk to them about the insurance policies—or about anything else of recent date. The Caphians, he discovered, had built a calendar around the first appearance of Dzanku. The present was, therefore, the year 20 A.G.G.F. (After the Great Gray Father) and everything that happened earlier was B.G.G.F. They were all quite willing to discuss B.G.G.F. events with him; but he could learn nothing about the past twenty

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years. Not even the form of political government they had.

It was difficult to think of time in terms of days where everything outdoors was always black night and indoors was only a pale glow, barely enough to see by. But it was obvious that days were slipping by.

The food on Caph II was slightly exotic but not unpalatable, and they soon came to enjoy it after a fashion. Their rooms were comfortable. Except for their own company, there was practically no entertainment. Early in their visit, there was some sort of festival in one large building which they found by accident. But it turned out to have for a climax the execution of a Caphian. The only thing they could learn about the execution was that the victim was described as *the* Public Enemy.

There were a number of buildings where they could see old Terran motion pictures. These were not documentaries, as Manning had thought from Phyllos Stopter's description, but old comedies, Westerns, and mysteries from around the 20th Century on Terra. Many of them Manning and Vega had seen in the Ancient Terra Museum in Nuyork, and the prints were especially bad.

As for the rest, there just was no entertainment. There were a few public restaurants, but they served nothing but food. The Caphians apparently played no games and had no regular social gatherings.

In general, the Caphians seemed a strange mixture of advancement and primitiveness. On the one hand, there was the matter of their underground furnaces which kept half a planet at even temperature—an advanced engineering project. There was also a fairly complicated vehicle which could travel on the ground and was capable of short flights. But their engineering seemed to stop there.

As far as Manning could learn, they'd had no government of any sort before the appearance of Dzanku. With the realization that Dzanku had apparently set up their government, Manning began to have nightmares about what it would be like.

DESPITE the evidence of the execution of a public enemy, Manning could find no record of crime. That didn't mean it hadn't existed, for the Caphians had no written language and therefore had no records of any sort. And, in keeping with this, they were completely lacking in the traditions which played such an important part in most cultures throughout the galaxies. This made it far more difficult to judge what they might do in any situation.

Their architecture—from what he could see of it in torchlight—was interesting in a somewhat mad fashion. This was the result, he later realized, of building in terms of sound-reflection rather than sight. None of the buildings possessed numbers, nor were the streets named. But there was enough variation so that the Caphians could recognize a street or a building from the way their supersonic sound emissions bounced back.

If it hadn't been for a growing interest in each other, Vega and Manning would have soon been bored. As it was, a couple of weeks slipped quickly by. They slept when they were sleepy, ate when hungry, and spent all of their waking time getting to know each other better.

Then Phyllos Stopter showed up again.

"I have come to take you to the election meeting," he said.

"You mean Dzanku is here?" Manning asked.

"No, but he will arrive soon," the Caphian said.

He led them to a large building in the center of the city. There were probably five thousand Caphians gathered there. As in all of the other buildings, this one was dimly lighted.

"This will not be exactly an election," he explained. "It is what I believe you call a nominating meeting. The elec-

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tion will be held tomorrow, but since we will nominate only one individual for each office, it makes little difference."

He led them up to a platform in front, where a number of Caphians were already seated. They were introduced to Macro Moptad, Vespe Troptyl, Eptes Boptsie, Pipis Loptmor, Lasion Captna, and Nycter Memoptera, in that order.

"It is they," Phyllos explained as he guided them to seats on the platform, "who will make the actual nominations. They are known as the Committee Which Lives But to Serve the Great Gray Father."

"Very smooth," Manning admitted. "With this set-up like this, Dzanku doesn't even need to stuff ballot boxes. Tell me, when will it be possible to learn something about this mysterious government of yours?"

He was beginning to be genuinely curious about it. During the delay, he'd even tried to probe the minds of the Caphians, but they proved to be non-telepaths with natural mind shields which were impenetrable.

"Right now," Phyllos Stopter said promptly. "As soon as it is officially election day, the matters may be discussed. What would you like to know?"

"First, what sort of government do you have?"

"I believe the Great Gray Father called it a democracy."

"I'll bet," Manning said dryly. "What is Dzanku's function in all this?"

"He assists in our elections and advises us on all matters. In return for this, he collects all the taxes. Naturally, we accept his advice on all matters since he is far wiser than we are. At our first election, in return for all the things he has done for us, we confirmed the fact that he is our Great Gray Father in perpetuity. All other officers are elected every twenty years. In the few offices where vacancies occur rather often, substitutes are appointed as needed."

"Who is your top officer—after the Great Gray Father, of course?" Manning asked.

"The Private Eye."

MANNING looked at him in amazement. Then he got it, and quickly rubbed a hand over his face to hide his grin. He glanced at Vega who seemed to be busily stuffing her handkerchief in her mouth.

"Very interesting," Manning said gravely. "How did you happen to pick on that particular office to head your government?"

It seemed the obvious choice," Phyllos said. "In so many of the films showing the way of life on Terra, the Private Eye was the most respected authority of all, even though you apparently refused to recognize this officially. In patterning ourselves after you, we have corrected this oversight."

"I see," Manning said. He wondered how much extra profit Dzanku had made from the old films by passing them off as authentic pictures of Terran life.

The Caphian glanced around the platform, then lowered his voice. "I have, however, a confession to make," he said.

"Yes?" Manning said helpfully.

"At our first election we were unable to find a suitable candidate to become the Private Eye, so our highest office was unfilled during the past twenty years. Since none of us is fitted to be the Private Eye, the Great Gray Father promised to bring us a candidate—perhaps for this election. Isn't that thrilling?"

"Very," Manning said. "But why aren't any of you capable of being the Private Eye?"

"Why, it's obvious," exclaimed the Caphian. He pointed to his own face. "Our eyes are so public."

"I should have guessed it," Manning said apologetically. "Who ruled, then, in the absence of both the Great Gray Father and a Private Eye?"

"The Private Eye's consort and the other officials made out as best they could."

"And they are—"

"The Private Eye's consort is the

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Naked Blonde. Then there's the Cop, the Dick, the D. A., the Stern Old Judge, the Cowboy, the Old Rancher, the Virtuous Maiden, the Kindly Old Doctor, and John's Other Wife. Of course, we also elect a Public Enemy and a Rustler."

There were choking sounds from Manning's left. He kicked Vega gently on the shins and turned back to the Caphian.

"Miss Cruikshank occasionally has mild respiratory attacks," he explained to the Captain. "You were saying?"

"I mentioned that we also elect a Public Enemy and a Rustler. While their capture is really the responsibility of the officers, I must say that our entire population joins enthusiastically in the pursuit. It's really great fun. Of course, when they're finally caught, we appoint another Public Enemy or Rustler."

MANNING suddenly remembered the execution he and Vega had witnessed. "Wait a minute," he said. "You mean you really go through with it all the way? You elect them, then chase them down and execute them?"

"Of course," Phyllos Stopter said with dignity. "Crime Does Not Pay."

"It still seems to me that you're carrying it pretty far for a game," Manning said. "How do the victims feel about it?"

"They fully realize that it's an Honor and a Privilege to be Strung Up or Put in the Hot Seat, according to the ritual." The Captain frowned. "We've had only one spoil-sport in the twenty years. He went to the light side of our planet, which is, of course, out of bounds. I believe he starved to death there. It served him right."

"Who makes your laws?" Manning wanted to know.

"We elect two groups. The first group passes our more formal laws. They are known as the Seven Deadly Sins. The second group take matters into their own hands when the first group fails to act promptly. They are known as the Vigilantes."

"Tell me," Manning said, "does the other planet in this system operate the same way?"

"I don't know," Phyllos Stopter said. We never go there. One of our ancestors built a ship which would make the trip to our first planet, but when he returned the ship was destroyed. By his reckoning he had spent one week there, but here a hundred years had passed.*"

"All of this is very interesting," Manning said. "But, now, how about getting down to my reason for being here? Since this is some sort of an official body perhaps I can discuss the insurance policies with them before the election starts."

The Caphian shook his head. "We cannot discuss it when the Great Gray Father is not present; although I suppose that if you are prepared to make the payments on the policies now we could accept that."

"That is what I would like to discuss," Manning said grimly. "There is at least one glaring irregularity about the policies—I mean that Dzanku sold you the policies with an agreement that he was to get half of what you collected. As a matter of fact, this whole business smacks of fraud. We might, as a gesture of good will, pay something on each policy, but certainly not the face value."

The Caphian was gazing at him with an expression which seemed to indicate delight. Even his paddle-shaped ears were quivering. "This is wonderful," he exclaimed. "The Great Gray Father not only predicted that you would arrive here, but he also predicted that you would speak just as you have. Is this not a miracle?"

"Not so much a miracle," Manning said sourly. "Dzanku knew what he was doing so well that it was easy to predict what we'd think. Well, if you won't

* As Prof. Fignewton proved, Caph II was the focal point of the Time-Fracture with the time-distortion being reversed as you traveled away from the planet in any direction. This process was, however, immensely speeded up in the direction of the sun of the Caph system. Whereas the ratio between Caph II and Terra was 20 to 1 between Caph II and Caph I it was 5200 to 1. Therefore, while a week passed on Caph I a hundred years passed on Caph II and five years passed on Terra.

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discuss it, we might as well leave. I think you've told me enough so we can throw it into court."

"I'm sorry," Phyllos Stopter said. "It was predicted that you might try to leave, and it was agreed that it could not be permitted. You'll have to stay here until the Great Gray Father arrives."

"That's out of the question," Manning snapped. "In the first place, your Great Gray Father isn't coming—"

He was interrupted by a roar from the crowd.

"You are quite wrong," Phyllos Stopter said happily. "Here he comes now."

V

IT WAS true. Manning could only gape at the three figures who were walking toward the platform.

The one in lead was a Rigelian and was certainly Dzanku Dzanku. He was no more than about six feet tall, but he probably weighed all of a ton. His thick, square torso—light gray in color—was supported by two tree-like legs. His face was small and expressionless, with three eyestalks raised several inches above the top of his head. His six tentacles were waving to the crowd.

Directly behind the Rigelian strode a Terran. He was short and thin. His face, which usually wore a tense, wary expression, was split in a broad grin of triumph.

The third member of the trio was a stranger to Manning Draco. He was a native of the Sabikian System. He stood only about four feet high; his body was slender, and round from top to bottom. The upper half of his body and all of his head were completely covered with straight platinum blond hair, all of which grew from the top of his head and fell downward so that he resembled an upturned mop. A pair of tentacles protruded from the hair, but that was all that managed to penetrate the growth. His two feet were more like short flippers, but he seemed to have no trouble keeping up with the Rigelian and the Terran.*

The three of them marched up on the platform and over to Manning Draco. Sam Warren and the Sabikian halted just back of Dzanku Dzanku.

"My dear Manning," Dzanku said. "What a pleasure to see you again. And who, may I ask, is your charming companion?"

"Miss Vega Cruikshank," Manning said. He turned to the girl. "Vega, this is the celebrated Dzanku Dzanku. The rather skinny little runt behind him is Sam Warren. I'm afraid I'm not acquainted with the small fugitive from a barber shop."

"May I present Pisha-Paisha," Dzanku said. "A colleague of mine from Sabik."

"Hello," boomed the Sabikian, his deep bass voice issuing from somewhere back of the blond hair.

"Hey," Sam Warren said in tones of admiration. "She's some dish. That Manning always was a picker, eh?"

"Decidedly," Dzanku said. He gave a courtly bow to Vega. "Miss Cruikshank, it is a pleasure to meet the charming daughter of such a brilliant father. I trust that you will not permit yourself to be prejudiced toward me by the opinions of your father and Manning. They are so persistent."

While Dzanku was speaking to Vega, Manning Draco made his first move—an attempt to learn what the Rigelian planned. He tried a fast mental probe of Sam Warren. The little Terran winced under the impact, but Manning learned nothing. As usual, the important synapses had been erased clean by Dzanku. Manning switched and struck at the Sabikian. He was met with such a blast of malevolence that he withdrew in self-defense.

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* Sibakians are unrelated to any life form known on Terra. They are a sightless race; thus it makes little difference that their hair covers the face. Like the Caphians, they are naturally equipped with a sort of sonar. This, plus acute hearing and minor telepathic powers, enables them to do just as well without sight. Although extremely intelligent and highly advanced, the Sabikians are an aggressive, anti-social race. While the rest of the galaxy carries on considerable trade with the Sabikians, every merchant ship going to the system of Sabik has to be accompanied by a Patrol ship.

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"Vicious little character, isn't he?" Dzanku asked, having missed none of the byplay.

EXPECTING nothing, but feeling the need for some action, Manning slashed a probe at the Rigelian, but the latter's shield stopped it. Purely out of reflex action, Dzanku struck back. Manning felt the surge of mental power against his own secondary shield; then it withdrew.

"We are worthy foes," Dzanku said. "Of all those who I've fought, you are the one I most respect, Manning. The only Terran who has ever developed a secondary mind shield—the only non-Rigelian who has ever penetrated my shield, even though you did it the once by trickery. Yes, I shall regret your final defeat."

"It won't come from you," Manning said. "How did you get out of Andromeda?"

"It was relatively simple," Dzanku said. "I merely found a rich patroness who took me out of the Pleasure Camp for use in her own private harem. I invaded her mind and took possession of it. She told everyone that she and I were going away for the weekend and she then piloted me to Rigel IV. I've written a little something* about the episode. I would have brought you an autographed copy, but they weren't ready yet."

"I am desolated," Manning said. "This is some sweet little setup you have here, Dzanku."

"I like it," Dzanku said.

"You don't really expect to get away with it, do you?" Manning went on. "The fraud is pretty obvious. As soon as I report the situation to the Committee on Extra-Planetary Affairs, they'll certainly cut the claims in half—if they don't throw the whole thing out."

---

* *I was a Love Slave*, the Uninhibited Memoirs of a Victim of Andromedan Sex Practices, by Dzanku Dzanku. Published by Doublelightyear & Company, ¢2.25. Available at all galactic book stores. (adv.)

[*Turn page*]

"... IMAGINE ME dancing with a scarecrow! How can he be so careless about his hair? It's straggly, unkempt, and . . . Oh-oh—loose dandruff! He's got Dry Scalp, all right. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic."

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"Ah, but I do expect to get away with it," Dzanku said. "The Committee has already given J. Barnaby thirty days in which to pay off. This will stand as long as they have no evidence to make them reverse their decision. You, my dear Manning, are not going to make your report before that thirty days are up—if at all. Incidentally, there are guards posted at the spaceport, so I'm afraid you can't make a run for it."

"What are you going to do?" Manning asked.

"You'll soon see," Dzanku promised. If Rigelians were capable of smiling, Manning was sure that Dzanku would have been smiling as he turned and walked to the center of the platform. He held up three tentacles and the murmur of voices died down.

"My dear ones," he said, "I, your Great Gray Father, have returned even as I promised you I would. As was predicted in my Epistle to the Caphians, I was somewhat delayed; but I bring good news which will more than make up for the delay of the elections. After twenty years of being without a proper head for your government, I bring you one who is perfectly equipped to serve as your Private Eye. Never have you seen one whose eyes were more private. I give you your friend and mine—Pisha-Paisha."

There was a roar from the crowd as the Sabikian stepped forward.

"Good Chiroptera," Pisha-Paisha said in his booming bass voice. "I come before you wearing no man's collar, dedicated to no program save that of your welfare and amusement. If elected, I promise—"

"Pipe down," Dzanku said, covering his mouth with a tentacle. "I make all the speeches here. Besides, it's in the bag."

THE Sabikian withdrew to the back of the platform. It was impossible to tell if he were disappointed.

Dzanku said, "I, therefore, nominate Pisha-Paisha as your Private Eye, to serve for the next twenty years."

There was a roar of approval from the crowd.

"Now for the other nominations," Dzanku continued. "For the office of the Naked Blonde, I nominate Coryno Preoptsis." There was another roar of approval. Such roars continued to go up after each name was mentioned: "For the Cop, Dasyp Throptsora; for the Dick, Euder Zopta; for D. A. Nycti Wonopter; Myo Cranoptsa as the Stern Old Judge; Mega Optopta as the Cowboy; Molossid Choroptsyl as the Old Rancher; for the Kindly Old Doctor, Nycter Memoptera; Virtuous Maiden, Antroz Anoptical; Lasion Coptna as John's Other Wife."

Everybody was obviously nominated unanimously. The same applied to the seven names Dzanku rattled off for the Seven Deadly Sins and for the twenty names he mentioned for the Vigilantes. Then he paused and there was an atmosphere of expectation in the room.

"Now," Dzanku said, "I wish to nominate our good friend, Eptes Boptsie, as the Rustler." There was a burst of applause. "And as Public Enemy, I present a man whom you will come to love as much as I do—Manning Draco."

The applause and shouting was deafening.

Manning Draco was too stunned to do anything but stare.

"And now a special treat," Dzanku said. "This year we are creating a new office which should increase our future pleasure. To serve simultaneously with the new Public Enemy, we are electing a Gangster's Moll. For this responsible position, we are nominating Miss Vega Cruikshank."

Applause, huzzas and hoorays.

Manning was on his feet by the time the sound had died down.

"Dzanku," he said, "you must have blown your jets! You can't get away with this bare-faced plan to murder Vega and myself. You know what will happen if you succeed in killing us. Not only will there be no payment of any kind, but J. Barnaby swings enough in-

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fluence in galactic affairs to have this whole planet de-energized right out of existence by the Patrol."

"The—ah—accident," Dzanku said, "will not be discovered until after we've collected the money. If you and Miss Cruikshank prove especially agile, it may not even *happen* before then. When it does, however, everyone will be quite upset about it. All sorts of apologies will go forth. I will feel quite badly myself, although I fear I won't be able to take part in the apologies and explanation. Pressing business will demand my presence elsewhere."

"So that's how it'll be," Manning said. He turned to face the crowd. "Caphians, don't you realize that Dzanku Dzanku is a famous galactic criminal? There are warrants out for his arrest on a dozen planets. He is now planning something which may cause your entire planet to be destroyed—but he will not be here to die with you."

There was a low murmur of anger from the crowd.

"Please," Dzanku said. "You are speaking of the Great Gray Father of Caph. You are making my friends angry."

MANNING had first thought that the tone he'd heard was directed against the Rigelian, but now he realized that the Caphians were glaring at him.

"Okay," he said to Dzanku, "you win that round. But at least let Miss Cruikshank leave the planet. She's done nothing against you."

"I want to stay with you, Manning," Vega said firmly.

"A proper sentiment," Dzanku said. "Besides, my dear Manning, although the question about Miss Cruikshank concerns not what she may have done against me in the past but rather of what she might do in the future, I still wouldn't think of interfering with such local matters. My dear Pisha-Paisha—as the new Private Eye, would you consider granting an amnesty to Miss Cruikshank?"

"No," boomed the Sabikian. "Justice must prevail. These people represent an element which must be wiped out to the last man—er—and the last woman. If I am elected—"

"I told you it was in the bag," Dzanku snapped rudely. He turned back to Manning before the latter could say anything. "I would suggest, my dear Manning, that you waste no more time in foolish argument. You see, on this planet, officers assume the mantle of their office before they are elected. Therefore, you have about an hour before the greatest manhunt—and womanhunt—in the history of Caph will begin. Out of a spirit of friendship, I suggest that you make use of that hour."

"Don't knock yourself out trying to do us a favor," Manning said. "Come on, Vega."

He took Vega's hand and they walked down through the crowd, which was now definitely unfriendly. Outside, he switched on his torch and hurried her down the street.

"Manning, what will we do?" Vega asked anxiously. "What can we do in only an hour? We haven't got a chance in this darkness. . . ."

"Yes, we do," Manning said. They were already a couple of blocks away from the election building. "I took one precaution which Dzanku knows nothing about. We can't get off the planet, but we can get away from this part of it. Here, hold the torch."

She took it and Manning pulled something from his pocket. It was a small square box with two tiny knobs set into its face. Manning began manipulating the knobs.

"What's that?" Vega asked.

"Remote control, tuned to the life raft on the *Alpha Actuary*. This will bring it to us. It'll be gone before the guards around the ship know what is happening. The raft doesn't have enough power to leave the planet, but it'll outfly any of the cracker-boxes these characters have. Keep the light up, so I don't bring it down on our heads."

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In a few moments, the small life raft suddenly appeared out of the darkness. Manning moved the remote-controls and it drifted slowly down to the ground beside them. They both climbed aboard. In the light of the torch, Manning set the controls of the raft. Then he clicked off the torch.

The raft rose swiftly above the dark city.

VI

WITHIN three hours the blackness had turned to a murky gray. Only a few more minutes and the view was similar to that of a sunrise on Terra. The great sun of Caph appeared just over the horizon ahead of them. It was the first sight of sunlight they'd had in two weeks and they blinked in the bright glare.

He continued to fly for another hour over the bright side of Caph II. Then he brought the raft lower and searched for a landing place. He finally found one that suited him and brought the raft down on a stretch of blue soil near one of the little pink lakes. It was a spot slightly higher than the surrounding land, giving them a good view in every direction. And there was a cluster of towering purple trees which offered partial concealment for them.

"Now what do we do?" Vega asked as they stepped out on the ground. "I must confess that I feel better just from the fact that there's some sunshine."

"Me, too," Manning said. "Although after while it may become as tiring as the perpetual darkness. I guess the first thing to do is fix a place to live for the time being and then—I'm hungry. How about you?"

"I am—but what do we do about it? Do you suppose there's some game around? And will it be safe to eat it if there is?"

"Don't worry about game," Manning said. "This raft is meant to take care of the shipwrecked spaceman. I guess we fall into that category." He opened the rear of the raft and took out a tiny square package. "This, believe it or not, is a very fine tent."

He opened valves on the package and they greedily sucked in air, filling the walls of the tent. When the walls were rigid, he set it beneath the purple trees. It made a snug little shack, eight feet long and six feet wide, with air-filled walls and an air-cushioned floor. Vermin proof and insect proof.

"Home was never like this," Manning said as they surveyed it. "Now, for that dinner." He took a small telemeter from the raft and twisted the controls, watching the dials. "We have a choice of a number of dehydrated morsels, which the Spacemen's Service guarantees to supply us the proper diet. They say nothing about the taste, so I think I'd rather have a steak. How about you?"

"A steak?" Vega said. "You're kidding."

"Never," he said seriously. He was busily dragging small items from the raft. "Steak, I think, *and* a tossed green salad, with perhaps a raw egg added to the dressing." A small piece of metal unfolded into a cooking plate. Other pieces buckled together and mysteriously became a servomotor. Manning set the controls on it and then stood back with a gesture. The servomotor hummed pleasantly.

There were hazy lines on the platform of the servomotor. They coalesced and became a steak, juicy and red. Manning removed it and waited for a second one.

"Manning," Vega exclaimed. "You're wonderful."

"Not me," he said modestly. "Science. It plucks protein and iron and calcium, and all the little things the Spacemen's Service struggle so hard to dehydrate, from the air and makes a steak." He pulled the second one from the platform and shut off the servomotor. "How would you like yours, honey?"

"Medium rare," she said. "You're making me feel ever so much better, Manning. I was feeling very isolated and pioneering and despairing, but we're go-

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ing to be all right—aren't we?"

"Maybe," Manning grunted. He slipped the two steaks on the cooking plate and set its controls. He pulled some tiny packages from the raft and selected one. "You might as well know the best and the worst, honey. Thanks to the raft, we'll have a reasonably comfortable place to sleep. We have enough food, and means of getting food, to last us for almost two years if necessary. We have a small energy gun which will hold off any direct attacks—especially since I don't think the Caphians have much in the way of weapons and the *Alpha Actuary* is locked so they can't use her. Water can't represent a very serious problem. We even have a small emergency communication set which will reach out about a thousand miles—enough if someone comes looking for us. I don't think Dzanku Dzanku can do very much about dislodging us. On the other hand, we can't do much but sit here unless someone comes after us."

He was fiddling with the servomotor again.

"You'll think of something," Vega said confidently.

MANNING winced. "For a moment, you sounded exactly like your father—but I'll overlook it," he said magnanimously. He turned on the servomotor and it upended and began burrowing into the ground. It quickly disappeared, sending a stream of blue sand spurting up behind it.

They watched it without speaking. After a while the servomotor climbed up out of the small, round hole it had made in the ground. Manning turned it off and opened a container in it. There was a small amount of pink fluid in it. He examined it with the telemeter.

"Well, aside from the color," he said, "it's very like Terran water, so I guess we can drink it. Maybe the color will grow on us." He took a short, thin section of pipe from the raft. He pulled on the ends. It telescoped out. He thrust it down into the hole made by the servomotor. He held a cup near the top of the pipe and pressed the plunger-button. A pink stream shot out into the cup.

Manning tried it. "Hey, not bad," he said. He passed the cup over to Vega.

"Wonderful," Vega said when she'd tasted it. "It tastes more like wine!"

"The telemeter still says it's water, and it never lies," he said. He took a small amount of the water and the small packages he'd selected earlier. A moment later he had a bowlful of bright green salad. Another tiny package and the water produced the salad dressing for the greens. Then Manning again changed the controls on the servomotor and switched it on. The motor hummed and substance shimmered on the platform.

"You know," Manning said, watching it. "Centuries ago our ancestors used to titillate themselves with the question of which came first, the chicken or the egg. Now, if they'd had a servomotor, they could have answered the question." He reached out and picked up the egg from the platform. He broke it over the salad.

By this time the steaks were ready. They sat on the ground in front of the tent and ate.

"Sorry there's no coffee," Manning said when they'd finished. "I guess they decided that wrecked spacemen can get along without it."

"I don't mind," Vega said. She'd stretched out on the ground and was sipping some of the pink water. "You know I'm going to find it hard to realize that time is passing when the sun is always in the same place in the sky."

"It's passing, all right. Unless I've gotten twisted up, we just had a fashionably late dinner."

"And a very good one, too. I've never met anyone who could cook so well out of thin air. You'd be a blessing to a thrifty housewife."

"I like you, too," Manning said. "In fact, I just polled myself a few minutes ago, and I've voted you the girl I'd most like to be stranded with on Caph II."

Vega laughed. "Why, thank you. Al-

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though I must say it sounds like a far-fetched possibility." She glanced at the tent. "Our new house looks quite nice. Tell me, does your magic raft also supply beds?"

"Bed," Manning said succinctly. He got up and walked over to the raft. When he returned he was carrying a small machine and a coil of wire. He sat on the ground and inserted the wire into the machine.

"Music, too?" Vega asked.

"Not exactly," Manning said. "I've been meaning to ask you something, Vega. Will you marry me?"

SHE stared at him, wide-eyed.

"I hadn't exactly thought of asking you in these particular surroundings," Manning went on, "but I see no reason for letting Dzanku interfere with *everything*. Will you?"

She looked at him for a long moment, then nodded almost shyly. He leaned over to kiss her.

"You mean when we get back to Terra, don't you?" she asked later.

He shook his head, grinning. "No, I meant right now. I told you I'd been meaning to ask you."

"I don't understand," she said.

"Back on Terra," he said, "when the spy-ray told me there was someone already in my ship, I used a telemeter. The analysis of the perfume and cosmetics agreed with what you'd been wearing during the Festival. So I was pretty sure it was you. Remember that I requested a five minute delay from the launching tower?"

She nodded.

"Well, I went into the terminal and applied for a wedding license to marry Vega Cruikshank. I also arranged for a remote ceremony. It's recorded on this magniwire. This machine can simultaneously record and play, so all we have to do is turn it on and answer in the proper places. The machine itself will automatically record the date. When we return we'll deposit the spool of wire with the Bureau of Records."

"I never knew science was so wonderful," Vega said.

"Oh, sure," Manning said. "At least, J. Barnaby can't question my intentions on this trip."

"It'll never occur to him." She giggled. "You know, Daddy had planned to send me on a trip with an old family retainer. Before I went to stow away on your ship, I bribed the servant to leave, so I'm sure Daddy thinks I'm safely touring the galaxy and recovering from a school girl infatuation. So if that's the only reason you're doing this, you can still change your mind."

"A Draco never takes a backward step," Manning declared.

He switched on the machine. A moment later, they were responding to the voice that came from the loudspeaker.

When it was over, Manning picked up Vega and carried her into the tent.

"Under the circumstances," he said, "I think we can just ignore the Caphian sun and declare night to be any time we want it. But, first, a very important item. . . ."

He hurried out of the tent. When he returned he was holding both hands behind him. "It didn't turn out exactly right," he said. "I'm afraid that the servomotor couldn't find enough sugar in the Caphian atmosphere, so the icing tastes a little like cotton." He brought one hand into view. It was holding a reasonable facsimile of a wedding cake. Then he produced the other hand. In it was two cups of Caphian water. "Pink Champagne," he said.

Vega laughed and came into his arms. The wedding cake and the "pink champagne" dropped to the floor unnoticed.

It was much later before either of them spoke.

"It was very thoughtful of the Spacemen's Service," Vega said sleepily, "to provide only one bed."

VII

BY MANNING DRACO'S reckoning a week passed without any sign of

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Dzanku Dzanku or the Caphians. Except for the necessity of keeping a lookout, it might have been a pleasant honeymoon. Then, shortly after their eighth breakfast, one of the peculiar-looking Caphian vehicles came into sight, flying slowly towards them. Its course left no doubt that the campers had been spotted. Manning held the energy gun and waited.

The vehicle descended to the ground just out of firing range. The figure that climbed out was easily recognized as that of the Rigelian. He turned to face them, but made no move to draw closer.

Manning. It was a thought inside Manning's head. He recognized it as coming from Dzanku. The distance was too great for conversation, so the Rigelian was resorting to telepathy.

What took you so long? Manning thought.

My Caphians are still badly trained in the art of intrigue. Dzanku's thought was tinged with embarrassment. *It was only about an hour ago that they discovered the life raft was gone from your ship. Until then it was believed that you were hiding somewhere on the dark side. The penalty of inadequate help.*

"What's going on?" Vega asked in a sleepy voice.

"I'll tell you later, honey," Manning said.

Are you armed? came Dzanku's thought.

Yes.

I was afraid so. Unfortunately, the Caphians have very inferior weapons and I neglected to bring any with me. You see, I am being perfectly frank with you, my dear Manning.

Nice of you.

Not at all. Due to a blunder you have been permitted to gain a temporary stalemate. I'd rather not have to sit it out. So if you and Miss Cruikshank would care to surrender, I will merely hold you as prisoners until the insurance policies are paid, and then you can go home.

You mean the Great Gray Father will take us under his wing. Dryly.

Yes. I can guarantee your eventual freedom even though the Caphians are disturbed by the turn of events. They think it was very unsporting of you.

So sorry to disappoint them, Manning thought. *And you. But I'm afraid we rather like it here. So we'll have to turn down your kind offer.*

Why? I know your raft is incapable of taking you off Caph. I also know that you can't get a message out. We both know that J. Barnaby will not let loose of one trillion credits until the last possible minute. That's thirty days Terran time—which is more than a year and a half on Caph.

We have enough food for two years. And before the time is up J. Barnaby will ask the Patrol to investigate why he hasn't heard from me.

You refuse to surrender, then?

Yes.

Dzanku turned and re-entered the Caphian ship. A moment later it lifted into the air and moved leisurely away.

"Now will you tell me what that was about?" Vega demanded. "The two of you standing a mile apart and glaring at each other!"

Manning repeated the telephathic messages and explained his own special abilities along that line. If he exaggerated a trifle, it can be blamed on the fact that Vega was beautiful and that they had been married only a week. And if she seemed to believe even more than he said, it was because matters have always stood in this fashion between a man and woman in love.

"I don't think I like that," she said, frowning. "Imagine being married to a man who can read your mind. It's positively indecent."

"Your mind?"

"No, silly. It's an invasion of privacy. They shouldn't permit people like you to just wander around."

"*We* have ethics," Manning said loftily. "Besides, you could always have me arrested for wife-peeping." He put his arm around her and drew her closer.

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DURING the next three weeks there were four attempts made on them. Three times the Caphians came by air, and once on foot. They were armed with primitive combustion weapons which were no match for Manning's energy gun. All four raids ended in a complete defeat for the Caphians, without Manning and Vega even being in danger.

"We ought to be due for another visit from Dzanku," Manning said after the fourth try. "I think it's about time to switch tactics."

"How?"

"If we just stay on the defensive, Dzanku is liable to come up with something that's too much for us. He's plenty smart and he does have enough time. I doubt if your father will get worried enough to have the patrol sent for about three weeks—which is sixty weeks Caphian time."

"But what can we do?"

"I think we have one chance," Manning said slowly. "Rigelians are great gamblers. In fact, they can't resist any sort of gambling. I've used this gambit against Dzanku before, so it'll have to be something special. I think I will challenge Dzanku to a game of *Tzitsa.**"

"That's a game?" Vega asked.

"It's a game," Manning said. "You might call it a sort of cosmic and deadly crossword-puzzle game. It's limited to two players. Dzanku certainly gets few chances to indulge in it. He could play it with Pisha-Paisha, since the Sabikian is telepathic; but he needs him, so that would take the pleasure out of it. You see, *Tzitsa* is continued day after day, never ending until one of the two players is either dead or a drooling idiot. Dzanku will jump at the chance to play with me."

"But it's dangerous," Vega protested.

"No more so than sitting here," Manning said. "This way, Dzanku can keep trying out new ideas until he hits on one that works. It he's playing *Tzitsa* with me, he'll have no time to be working out other schemes. I can hold my own with him mentally, and maybe I can trick him into position where I can win."

"But how can you trust him?" Vega wanted to know. "If we go back to the dark side, he'll have us where he wants us."

"Normally, that would be true, honey. Judged by our standards, Rigelians are amoral. To them, lying, stealing and getting the best of anyone in any way is socially acceptable. If Dzanku can cheat me when we're playing, he will. But if he were to kill us or imprison us when we've gone there specifically to play *Tzitsa,* that would be tantamount to running on a gambling challenge. That would disgrace Dzanku for life. The fact that I'm a Terran would make it worse. So Dzanku's pride will force him to keep his word."

AS MANNING predicted, within twenty four hours one of the Caphian ships appeared and settled to the ground just out of the range of an energy gun. The Rigelian appeared and faced toward them.

Are you ready to surrender, Manning?

We're very comfortable, Manning thought in response.

Don't let your small success go to your head. The only reason you're still alive is that the Caphians have always considered this half of their planet out of bounds. Except for very brief hunting forays after a certain insect which they like, they have had a deep prejudice against coming here. But I am overcoming this, and when they are finally convinced, I will have one hundred million Caphians, all of whom are expendable. What chance do you think your puny little energy gun will have then?

---

* *Tzitsa* was invented by Tzitsakele Tzitsakele, a famous gamester of the 12th Dynasty on Rigel IV, after whom it is named. It was an immediate success with the Rigelians and has always remained the most popular game on that planet. *Tzitsa* is directly responsible for keeping the Rigelian population at low level, it being estimated that there are around one billion *Tzitsa* fatalities on Rigel IV each year. Emanuel Chotnik, the well known Terran philosopher contends that *Tzitsa* is the greatest boon the galaxy has ever known; that without it as a check on the Rigelian population, Rigel IV would have long ago attempted to conquer the galaxy. The fatalities also explain why the game has never been taken up, except in a modified and more peaceful form, by other telepathic races.

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Manning Draco carefully kept his secondary shield drawn over any deeper thoughts, as he projected his answer: *We'll worry about that when you get them convinced. Our only problem here is one of boredom when there are no Caphians to shoot. The next time you drop out, you might bring along a small Tzitsa board, if you have one.*

He caught the flash of excitement in Dzanku's mind before the Rigelian blocked it out. *You play Tzitsa?*

Didn't you know? Manning thought, with just the proper amount of surprise. *I learned from Sbita Sbita. Three or four years ago.*

Sbita Sbita was a good player. No more thoughts followed it. Manning knew that, back of his secondary shield, Dzanku was wrestling with temptation.

"I think I've got him," Manning said softly to Vega.

I don't have a small Tzitsa board, came the Rigelian's thought finally, *but I have had the Caphians build a regulation board in one of the buildings in Optville. It's as fine as any board on Rigel. I've been having a few practice games with Pisha-Paisha, but Sabikians have no flair for games. If you'd care to come into the city. . . .*

And have you grab us the minute we crossed into the darkness? Manning thought scornfully.

No. Upon my gambling honor, you and Miss Cruikshank will not be molested in any way. The only restriction is that your ship will still be guarded and you will not be permitted near your communications.

Manning let a sense of excitement and temptation flash across the surface of his thoughts, and then he apparently clamped down on them as though to conceal an eagerness to play. *There would have to be conditions.*

What?

We are no longer to be known by those ridiculous appellations, the Public Enemy and the Gangster's Moll. If you must have them, elect new ones. The scope of the Tzitsa must be limited to Ancient Terra. And it must be announced at the beginning that if I win, I take over all of your powers on this planet.

Dzanku hesitated only a minute.

Agreed. I will return for you soon. As he turned toward his ship, the Rigelian's thoughts were heavy with arrogance and triumph. He didn't bother to try to conceal the amusement he felt at the thought that a Terran dared to challenge him at *Tzitsa.*

Manning and Vega watched the ship leave.

"Well?" Vega asked.

"He fell for it," Manning said. "He's so sure of himself that he even agreed to limiting the game to Ancient Terra. He might have scorned playing with me, but I convinced him that I'm good."

"How?"

"I told him that I learned to play from Sbita Sbita and that I finally defeated him. Sbita was a Rigelian who finally pulled one trick too many and was killed on Deimos four years ago. But practically no one knows how he was killed, so Dzanku was willing to believe me. He's coming back for us."

"Manning," Vega asked uncertainly, "are you sure we should go? We're safe here."

"It's better this way, honey," he said. He put his arm around her and drew her close. "Don't worry. We'll pull through."

VIII

A FEW hours later, Dzanku was back. Manning and Vega got in the life raft and followed him back into the darkness of the other side of the planet. Manning started using his torch as soon as they left the sunlight.

They set the ships down near a large building and went inside. It was by far the largest building they'd seen on Caph. Its ceiling was a good twenty stories above the floor. One entire wall and the ceiling were covered with closely-fitted blocks about a foot square.

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Sam Warren was there, grinning nervously as they came in. There were a small handful of Caphians present, but that was all.

"Where are all your little friends?" Manning asked, looking around.

"We elected a new Public Enemy and and a new Gangster's Moll," Dzanku said, "so they're all out hunting them. There's nothing they love more than a good exciting chase. Playful little rascals, aren't they?"

"Oh, very," Manning said dryly.

"I shall miss them when I've retired with my half-a-trillion credits," Dzanku said.

"*If* you retire," Manning responded. "You want to talk all day, or shall we play *Tzitsa?*"

"By all means, we shall play," Dzanku said. His three eyes were alight with excitement. "It's too bad you never mentioned this talent of yours before, Manning, old friend. Come on."

He led the way to one end of the room. There were two large, comfortable chairs facing each other. Near them were smaller chairs.

"Miss Cruikshank and Sam can be observers," Dzanku said. "I've trained a number of Caphians to work the switchboard, so everything is in readiness."

"Manning," Vega said, as she walked with him to his chair, "how does this work?"

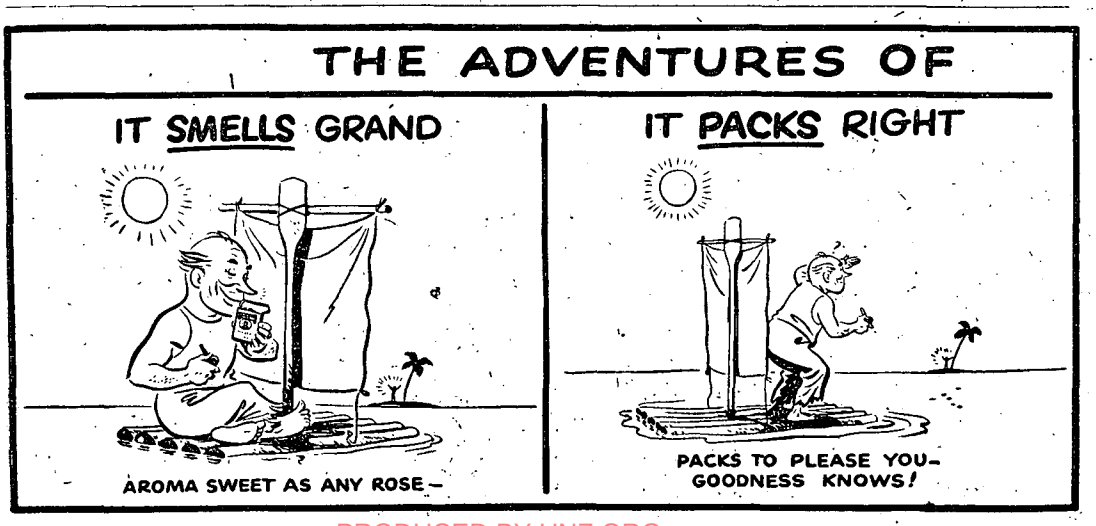
"Simple," Manning said. "It's much like a crossword puzzle. Let us say that Dzanku goes first. He has to give me the definition of a word and the number of letters in it. But only one of these does he give me vocally. The other I have to pick out of his mind. It's only a thought. Then I can either work out what the word is or try to pull the word itself out of his mind from behind his secondary shield. While I'm doing that my mental defenses must be let down to some degree and he will then try to strike with enough mental force to kill me. As the game progresses, it becomes more complicated because each new word must fit into the over-all pattern up there." He pointed to the squares on the wall and the ceiling.

"As each word is given," he continued, "it is put up there. Lights back of the blocks spell it out. As the game progresses, we must try to form the pattern of words into a recognizable design. And we take turns. First, Dzanku will feed a definition and try to kill me while I'm getting the word; then I will give him a definition and try to kill him while he's getting it. And this goes on until one of us wins." He grinned reassuringly at her.

"Are you ready?" Dzanku asked.

Manning nodded.

"Horizontal, twenty-one," the Rigelian said.



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"A Vtiga gambit*," Manning muttered.

"Five letters," Dzanku announced.

MANNING DRACO warded off the probing strength of the Rigelian's mind and fished for the thought. He got it almost immediately: *Agalloch wood.*

"Garoo," he announced. A second later, the word flashed into existence on the wall.

The first few rounds, Manning knew, would be easy. Neither he nor Dzanku would be anxious to futilely waste mental strength, so they'd both make only tentative stabs for a while.

"What happens," Vega whispered to him, "if you get a word that fits the definition and the spaces but wasn't the one he was thinking of?"

"It counts," Manning said. He turned his attention back to the Rigelian. "Vertical fifty. Sour ale." He thought: *six letters,* and felt Dzanku nibbling at his mind. He lashed out and his strength bounced off Dzanku's shield.

"Alegar," the Rigelian said, and the word flashed on the wall. Dzanku continued: "Vertical one. Six letters." *Boastful air.*

"Parado," Manning said as he caught the thought. "Horizontal one. Seven letters." *Bowstring hemp.*

"Pangane," Dzanku answered.

It was, Manning thought, almost like fencing; but with mental energy instead of foils. It was parry and thrust, parry and thrust, only there was no pinking; a careless guard would be fatal.

"Vertical thirty-five. Grivet."

Four letters.

"Waag. . . . Horizontal seventy-two. Seven letters."

Green cheese.

"Sapsago. . . . Horizontal fourteen. Not to be escaped."

Eleven letters.

"Ineluctable. . . . Vertical ten. Starvation."

Six letters.

"Inedia. . . . Horizontal ninety-three. Two letters."

Whirlwind.

"Oe. . . . Horizontal forty. Spade-shaped."

Nine letters.

"Palaceous. . . . Vertical eighty-one. Synthetic rubber."

Nine letters.

"Elastomer. . . . Vertical forty-two. Sponge spicule."

[*Turn page*]

* Although a *Tzitsa* game may last for months or even years if the opponents are evenly matched in mental strength and skill, which means hundreds of thousands of horizontal and vertical strings of words, the Regelian rules provide for the players to proceed in blocks of one hundred words each way. The players may skip around within the framework of the hundred words across and the hundred words down, but the final square must still fit together. The Rigelian who started this rule was Vtiga Vtiga. Therefore, the player who chose to start with any position other than Horizontal One, or Vertical One, was said to be using a Vtiga gambit.

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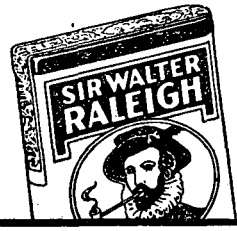

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And so it went. Placement, definition, number of letters. Parry and thrust. Answer. Manning Draco and Dzanku Dzanku crouched in the two chairs facing each other, their voices falling into buzzing monotones, their faces occasionally straining with effort. A small section of the wall lighted up with words.

Twice they stopped to eat, and take a short rest; then they were back at the deadly game. In the beginning, they took no more than a minute for each word, but the time slowly lengthened. Halfway through the day they were up to about five minutes for each word, and this proved to be about their average. Sometimes they took longer, when one or the other would make a surprise thrust and their mental energies would be locked for several suspense-filled seconds.

THEY'D been at it for twelve hours when they finally halted for the day. They were to meet in the same place twelve hours from now. Manning was gray with tiredness. Dzanku's eyestalks drooped with fatigue.

After that, so far as Manning was concerned, all time became a refined torture. For twelve hours each day he and Dzanku played *Tzitsa*, battering at each other's minds. Then he would stagger to his hotel, with Vega helping him, and fall into deep sleep. When he would awaken, they'd be at it again. There was only darkness, the dim lights of the Caphian buildings, and the endless parries and thrusts of mental energy. Hours and days all melted into each other, and fatigue gripped him until he wondered if he'd be able to meet Dzanku again. But somehow he always found the strength, and they'd be at it again.

"To think," Manning said to Vega, "Rigelians do this for *fun*. No wonder we think they're a little crazy."

At first, Manning tried to keep a more accurate track of time by marking each session on the wall. But there were a few occasions when he was too tired to make even a mark, and soon his record was thrown off. Although he wasn't certain, he felt that too much time had passed and that he'd better make an attempt to end it.

The session that ended with Vertical twenty-five thousand, two hundred and eighty* was the one in which he decided that he'd have to make his supreme effort the following day.

He'd tried a number of tricks, as had Dzanku, but none of them had worked. He had, however, worked out a new tactic which he thought might turn the trick.

The session the next day started with a brand new block somewhere near the center of the ceiling. For the first time since they'd started playing, Manning Draco made no attempt to strike at Dzanku. He kept his own shield as securely locked as he could and concentrated on developing a special pattern of words on the ceiling.

The lack of attack made the Rigelian cautious, but as the hours went by with no trick in sight he recovered his vigor, lashing viciously at Manning. But he was still cautious enough that it was obvious that the new tactic had him worried.

The most immediate result of this was that Dzanku was the more exhausted of the two as they went into the final stretch of the session. Throughout nine hours, Manning had carefully fed words to Dzanku in such a manner that in the center of the ceiling there was a fairly solid block of words with the exception of a smaller block. Focal point of this smaller block was Horizontal twenty-five thousand, three hundred and forty-one. The words around it had limited it to eight letters. Vertical words had supplied four of the letters, so that it looked like this: A-A-A--A.

* This may seem like a long-playing game, and in terms of Terran games it was. Many games of *Tzitsa*, however, run this long on Rigel IV. The Rigelian record ended on Horizontal 627,453. It was a game of *Tzitsa* between Bloota Bloota and Zhunfa Zhunfa held on Rigel IV in 2946. When it ended in the defeat of Zhunfa, Bloota was himself so exhausted that he was unable to kill Zhunfa, although he did erase nearly all the latter's synapses. The winning word, incidentally, was *Zzzzzzy*—a phonetic spelling of an obsolete Spican word meaning "So what?"

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"Abigeat," Manning said, supplying the word for the last definition Dzanku had given. "Horizontal twenty-five thousand, three hundred and forty-one. Eight letters."

Calmness.

Manning turned to look at Vega and laughed.

Dzanku fumbled for the word. For once, he was slightly off balance. His tentacles were undulating nervously. He was becoming more and more worried by the fact that Manning had not struck at him once all day. The sight of Manning's carelessness, in the face of his own inability to immediately think of the word, made him try to snatch the answer from Manning's mind. He felt the Terran's shield give slightly and then stiffen. The Rigelian put all his strength into trying to find the concealed word.

He felt triumphant as he caught a fleeting suggestion of a word that seemed to be *ataraxia*. Of course, he thought—

AND at the moment, Manning Draco struck with all his force. The strength which he had carefully marshaled throughout the day exploded against Dzanku's shield. There was a split-second when the wily Rigelian struggled to repair his defense, but then Manning was through the shield. At the last moment, he softened the blow. He steeled himself against the impact of that alien mind and stayed there.

Dzanku Dzanku struggled futilely against the possession, something akin to panic in his three eyes. Finally, he subsided. His skin was ashen.

"Finish it," he gasped.

"No," Manning said. His voice was hoarse with strain, but he didn't dare use any of his strength to project thoughts, so he spoke. "I'll give you a chance to live. Did you announce that I would succeed you here if I won?"

"Yes," the Rigelian said.

Manning could tell this was the truth. "Tell Sam," he said, "to go get your Sibikian friend and bring him here. And you'd better tell him to warn the Sibikian to behave himself when he gets here."

"Go ahead, Sam," Dzanku said weakly. "You heard him."

The frightened little Terran scuttled from the building.

In a few minutes, he returned with Pisha-Paisha, and the two of them stood waiting for further orders.

"I'm letting you escape," Manning said with effort, "on one condition. I'll let you go to Caph I, but nowhere else. In fact, I'll see to it that you have no way of returning without finding a fuel there. And since you liked selling twenty-year-endowment policies so well, you can represent J. Barnaby on that one planet and for that one type of policy only. As long as you stay on Caph I and sell those policies, you'll be all right. But I'll arrange to have the Patrol throw a blockade around the Time-Fracture so if you ever leave you'll be nabbed. Do you accept that?"

"Yes," Dzanku said.

"Sam and Pisha-Paisha?"

"Whatever Dzanku says," Sam Warren mumbled.

"Yes," the Sabikian said in his booming voice.

"Okay," Manning said. He exerted a twisting force, then withdrew from the Rigelian's mind. There was a cry of pain from Dzanku and he slumped to the floor, unconscious.

While Sam Warren and Pisha-Paisha were still staring at Dzanku, Manning Draco struck again. This time at the Sabikian. The shield was a slight one and the Sabikian dropped to the floor beside the Rigelian.

"All right, Sam," Manning said. "I guess I can take care of you. So I'll help you start your trip." He turned to look at Vega. He saw how tired she looked and the lines of pain on her face. He shouted to the few Caphians in the building.

"Your Great Gray Father has resigned," he told them, nodding toward the recumbent Rigelian. "I am now your

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Great White Father. My wife doesn't feel well. Take her to our hotel and assist her in any way you can." He kissed Vega. "I'll be with you as soon as I can, honey. Take care."

He hurried out with Sam Warren. It took them no more than an hour to convert one of the Caphian ships into something that would be able to fly to Caph I, and cripple the ship which had brought Dzanku to Caph II. When the patched-up Caphian ship was ready, Manning saw to it that it was fueled enough to take it to the other planet and no more. Then he had the Caphians carry Dzanku Dzanku and Pisha-Paisha into the ship.

"They'll recover in two or three hours," he told Sam Warren. "It's been nice seeing you, Sam."

Sam Warren gave a sickly grin and went into the ship. A moment later it rose and headed for Caph I.

IX

THE Draco family spent another week on Caph II. As Manning explained to Vega, he could have used his power to make the Caphians settle for the return of their premiums, but he wanted to be fair with them. She agreed. So he spent several days coming to an agreement with them about their policies. Then he spent few more days with them on purely personal business. When he was through, the Caphians were happily engaged in a new pastime.

Manning and Vega made the trip from the surafce of Caph II to the outer rim of its atmosphere in several hours, going slowly so that sunlight would not burst too quickly upon eyes unaccustomed to light. Then he threw the *Alpha Actuary* into magnidrive.

There was one more brief stop before going on home. Manning spent two hours with the dignified members of the Committee on Inter-planetary Affairs. His connection with J. Barnaby Cruikshank was enough to get him admitted, but after that he was on his own. When he left, it was amidst happy smiles.

It was not much later that Manning Draco strode into the Nuyork offices of the Greater Solarian Insurance Company, Monopolated. The mousey receptionist looked up from a magazine, her eighth finger on the right hand marking her place.

"Oh, Mr. Draco," she said brightly. "Shall I tell Mr. Cruikshank you're here?"

"Don't bother," Manning said. He started to walk by when she said:

"Mr. Draco—I wonder if you could tell me a four letter word meaning no more?"

Manning stopped in mid-stride. He slowly reached over and took the magazine from her hands. "In this case, it would be *torn*," he said evenly. He ripped the magazine into shreds.

He went on down the corridor. The door scanner recognized him and swung open. J. Barnaby Cruikshank, looking more disheveled than usual, turned away from the big video screen which showed him everything that went on in the outer office.

"What was the meaning of that little display of temper?" he demanded.

"I," Manning said, "have just spent eight months doing crossword puzzles. Twelve hours a day. Two thousand eight hundred and eighty hours. One hundred and seventy-two thousand—"

"Never mind," J. Barnaby said hastily. "How did you make out?"

Manning grinned. "I settled with the Caphians for fifty per cent of the face value."

Relief and despair intermingled on J. Barnaby's face. "I'm a ruined man," he said in a melancholy voice. "That leaves me with a cash reserve of only thirteen units. Who can run a business on that?"

"You can," Manning said. "You'll have more money coming in. Besides you'll more than make it up. Dzanku and Sam Warren are working for you."

"What?"

Manning nodded. "I've limited them to Caph I, however, and they are to sell only twenty-year-endowment policies.

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Those will be policies you'll never have to pay off on."

"What do you mean?"

"Twenty years on Caph I are fifty-two hundred years on Terra. So the policies will be due in 8673." Manning chuckled. "I think it also rids us of Dzanku and Sam Warren. By the time they can find a fuel and get away, at least a hundred years will pass here."

For the first time, J. Barnaby looked happier. Manning could almost see him adding up the premiums on the policies that might be sold on Caph I. "But what will I do for cash in the meantime? Manning, my boy, I may be late with your salary due to your rashness."

"That's all right," Manning said airily. "I'm quitting anyway."

"*What?*"

"As of now," Manning said, nodding, "I'm going into business for myself. I've made an arrangement with the Caphians, and I've been granted a monopoly by the Committee on Interplanetary Affairs—although I had to give the robbers ten per cent."

"What business?"

"The Draco Vacation Service. Vacations on sunny Caph. It's just the thing for most of the population. Take a little overworked secretary who gets only a two week vacation. By dealing with me, she can spend her vacation on Caph, which means she'll have ten months of resting and yet will be gone only two weeks. It'll mean that everyone can work eleven and a half months and rest ten months out of every twelve months. I'll put every other vacation spot out of business."

"That's—er—very nice," J. Barnaby said dully. He hated to hear of anyone else making money. "But you've certainly put me in a spot, Manning."

"You're just over-tired, J. Barnaby," Manning said. "Why don't you take a week off and run up to Caph II? The five months rest will make you feel like a new man. I'll tell you what—it's on the house. Won't cost you a cent."

"That's very nice of you, Manning," J. Barnaby said uncertainly.

"Why not come home with me now for dinner," Manning said. "You can relax and we'll talk about it. I got married while I was gone, you see."

"You did?" It was J. Barnaby's third surprise. "Well, that was unexpected. A Caphian female?"

Manning shook his head. "A Terran girl."

"Oh?"

"This wench," Manning said, "stowed away on my ship, and I discovered her after I was out in space. She turned out to be pretty, so I decided to marry her."

"Well—I'm very glad to hear it, Manning. Just what you needed, my boy. I'm delighted."

"I'm glad you're delighted," Manning said gravely. "How about it? Want to come home to dinner with me?"

"I believe I will," J. Barnaby said. He'd decided it wouldn't hurt to cultivate Manning now that Manning was becoming a monopolist himself. "Stowed away on your ship, eh? I guess I wouldn't know her then. . . ."

"As a matter of fact, you do," Manning said. "Her name is — or was — Vega Cruikshank."

There was a long silence as J. Barnaby's face threatened to turn purple again. But at the last second he remembered that Manning Draco, the monopolist, was a different son-in-law than Manning Draco, the investigator.

"Well," he said weakly. "Married, huh? Er—congratulations."

"Thank you," Manning said. "Let's go now. I'd like you to see your grandson before he's put to bed. Incidentally, we've named him Barnaby Draco."

"Grandson!" yelped J. Barnaby Cruikshank. "Grandson? But that's impossible! You were gone only two weeks, and you said yourself that you met Vega only three days before you left."

"True. But while we were gone from here only two weeks, we were on Caph II for ten full months." Manning slapped J. Barnaby on the shoulder. "Come on, Grandpop!" ● ● ●

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OUR INHABITED UNIVERSE

PART X—A Planet in Doubt

By JAMES BLISH

DOUBLE or multiple star systems are extremely common in our universe. More than ten percent of all known stars are double or multiple, and theoretically slightly less than half of all suns belong to such systems. Our sun, however, through it has a large family of planets, seems to lack a companion sun.

Nevertheless our sun may have a stellar companion, and one within detectable range.

It may seem odd to suppose that we could have overlooked so conspicuous an object as a second sun should be. Our astronomical methods are precise enough to detect so tiny, distant, and non-luminous a body as Pluto; they are even precise enough to permit us to detect planets of much more distant stars. How could we have missed seeing a double for our sun?

Nevertheless we may have. Planets, small though they are, are usually comparatively easy to detect, because they are nearby and thus move rapidly against the overall stellar backdrop. The proper motions of most stars, on the other hand, are almost indetectably small, because of the much greater distances involved.

It is possible, for instance, that the three suns making up the star Alpha Centauri may be able to claim our sun as a fourth brother. All four stars may be moving around a common center, with our sun on the far end of its swing in relation to the other three stars.

The distance involved (about 4.3 light years) would make such a relationship impossible to pin down, even with the 200-inch telescope, until many hundreds of years of close observation had been devoted to it. But it is quite plausible; some complex star-families of this kind already are known. The Castor system is even more complicated—it includes two pairs of stars revolving around a common center, plus another nearby doublet revolving around a center com-

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mon to it and to the first pair of twins. The Mizar system presents a similar picture.

Secondly, we may have failed to detect our companion sun up to now (presuming it to be nearby, and not just an already-known star whose relationship to us we have not yet suspected) because of its smallness. We are just beginning to realize that the galaxies are full of stars which are far fainter and smaller than our own—though we used to think of our sun as a "dwarf" star. In the Alpha Centauri system, for example, there is a sun called Proxima Centauri (Proxima because it is the nearest of all known stars to us) which is so tiny and dim that it would not be a bright star even from a planet of one of the other two suns in its own system. We didn't discover Proxima until 1913, despite its nearness.

In comparison with Proxima Centauri, our sun is a glaring monster, and yet Proxima is not an unusually small star. There are a good many in the local group of suns which are smaller and feebler still.

A Distant Relative

Let's suppose, then, that our sun has a companion star of the same size and brightness as Proxima Centauri, and one which moves in an orbit around the sun at about the same distance. This Proxima-like companion would be 12,000 astronomical units, or about a sixth of a light-year, away—a long distance, even compared with the mean distance of Pluto from the sun, which is 39.4 AU's.

The "year" of such a star would be about 1,300,000 Earth years; Pluto's year is about 248 of ours. Consequently, our dwarf companion would change its position among the other stars by only one second of arc per Earth year. This is not an undetectable change, but it is small enough to require several years of the most painstaking measurement to establish beyond doubt.

If our sun's companion were also as faint as Proxima, there would be about *nine hundred* other stars in our sky which would look brighter to us. One of these would be Alpha Centauri, at 4.3 light years; another would be Sirius, at 500 light years.

And if this faint companion were so located as to be visible to us from Earth only in the extreme southern sky—say, from southern Argentina or Australia—it would probably have not yet even been mapped, let alone studied. One of the frustrating facts of modern astronomy is that all the large telescopes built so far have been located high up in the northern hemisphere of the Earth, so that we know a great deal about our northern sky and much less about the rest of the visible universe. Though both the Magellenic clouds, small galaxies which seem to be satellites of our galaxy, are visible only in the southern hemisphere, we have yet to study them with even so moderately powerful an instrument as a Schmidt camera.* If our sun has a Proxima-like companion high above his southern pole, therefore, we have yet to make a really adequate search for it.

Such a star would not make a very satisfactory sun for a family of planets, for it would give little light and less heat, but we are going to assign it at least one planet anyhow; and we aren't going to care if that planet is cold and airless. As a matter of fact, we'd prefer it that way, because we want to use it as a place to stand from which we can look at our solar system as a whole.

The nearest known star to us, Proxima Centauri, does not offer us much as an observation post. Seen from a planet of Proxima, Jupiter would be only four seconds of arc away from our sun, and would be drowned out completely in our sun's glare; the other planets, all of them less brilliant than Jupiter, would of course suffer the same fate. (Our

*Since a lunar observatory now seems to be within the near future, it is probable that no major astronomical instrument ever will be built in the southern hemisphere of Earth.

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imaginary companion star, on the other hand, would appear to be 2°12′ away from our sun, and thus would be visible through a telescope, just as we can see Proxima through a telescope from here.)

From a planet of our imaginary companion star, however, the situation would be more favorable. In the sky of such a planet, Jupiter would be 1′29″ of arc away from the sun, quite a considerable distance and one easily resolvable by a large telescope. The Earth probably would be too faint to be visible, but since it would be 17.4″ of arc from the sun, a 200-inch telescope on an airless world just might be able to detect it visually. (Not even Jupiter could be photographed, however; the sun would fog the plates too heavily.)

Let's suppose that the Earth would be detectable visually. What could we determine about our home planet under such circumstances, with the aid of all the apparatus and knowledge of modern astronomy?

Earth Observed

First of all, Earth's distance from the sun could be put down as being about 90 to 100 million miles. This is anything but a precise figure, but it would be serviceable enough. The length of the Earth's year could also be figured roughly from direct observation.

From here on out the going would get rough. The brightness of the Earth would be impossible to assess with any degree of accuracy, because of its nearness to the parent body. We could only say that the Earth is "very bright," a verdict forced upon us by our ability to see it at all in the glare of the sun. Probably we would place its albedo or reflecting power at about 0.7—which means that we would overestimate it by about 20 percentage-points.

This degree of brightness would lead us immediately to assume that Earth had an atmosphere, like Jupiter (a planet about which we have been able to collect some fairly reliable information), and we could be forgiven for assuming that the Earth must be swathed in a Jupiterlike atmosphere, deep, thick, and perpetually cloudy. Going on that assumption, plus the known mass of the Earth, which we could figure with reasonable exactness from our knowledge of the orbits of Jupiter and Saturn, we would place the minimum diameter of the Earth at 20,000 miles. We would arrive at this figure by figuring the radius of the Earth from the surface of its atmosphere to the center of the planet, just as the diameters of gas giants like Jupiter are figured. (Actually, the diameter of the Earth is only 7,913 miles, or about 8,400 miles counting the atmosphere—which nobody ever does.)

Now let's pause a moment and assess what we've found. We've taken a post only a sixth of a light year away from our sun—far closer than is any known star; we've arbitrarily assigned ourselves ideal observing conditions, and the best of equipment and advice; and virtualy everything we've been able to discover about the Earth under such good conditions has turned out to be wrong!

Suppose that *Thrilling Double-Star Stories* then asked us to write an article about what life must be like on Earth. Probably we'd begin it like this:

"The Earth, the nearest to its sun of the three known planets of Sol, must be a world of continual and violent storms. Its atmosphere is so thick, and its sun is so close, that Earth must be best compared to the deep tropics in the middle of a hurricane.

"Thus far we have been unable to decide whether or not there is any oxygen in the atmosphere of the Earth. Some hints the spectroscope has given us, however, indicate that water vapor may be present in rather large quantities. If oxygen is present also—though the case of Jupiter indicates that this is unlikely—Earth may be covered with a low-lying, flat, tough jungle, savage and im-

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penetrable. Animal life there would have to be savage and primitive to survive at all.

"If there is no oxygen, on the other hand, the face of the Earth may be covered entirely by storm-tossed, alkaline oceans, reeking of ammonia."

And so on. The editor would pay us for the article and print it, and we would spend the rest of our lives wondering whether or not some spaceship captain will eventually make a fool of us.

The Limits of Knowledge

This, unfortunately, is the handicap under which all astronomical speculation must labor. Astronomy as a science is unique among sciences in that it is not experimental in nature. Very few of the conclusions we draw about the stars can be tested in the laboratory. They can be tested only against the total record of observation, and against the results of whatever new observations they may suggest.

The distances over which the astronomer must work are so enormous that only enormous facts—facts so huge that they walk right up and hit him in the eye—even present themselves to observation. All other work in astronomy must be deductive, and dependent mostly upon mathematical concepts which may or may not turn out to be relevant to the universe of experience. At the present time, the small and subtle facts upon which the question of life on other worlds depends are almost all beyond the reach of astronomy; as we've seen above, even sticking to the known facts very rigorously indeed can produce wildly inaccurate speculations.

The speculations about the life-forms of other planets which have been the subjects of these articles have been as faithful to the known facts as their author could make them. The known facts, unfortunately, are utterly inadequate. We know far less than we need to know about even so near a world as Mars; under such circumstances anything we may have to say about Ganymede has to be classed as an educated guess.

In short, if every planet in our solar system, including "frigid" Pluto, should turn out to be teeming with indigenous life-forms, no one should be overwhelmed with surprise. We know next to nothing about Pluto that we can safely call a "fact." It seems to be an extraordinarily dense planet; suppose it should turn out to have a uranium core? If it does, all our present guesses as to its surface temperature will have to be thrown out the observatory window.

If There's No Life—

And if we find no life on any planet of our solar system but our own—even on Mars, despite the present evidence that points toward life on Mars—nobody should be too downcast over that, either. Right now, our knowledge of other planets is strictly observatory knowledge, supplemented somewhat by mathematical deskwork. We have not yet been permitted to touch and handle and test the actual materials which we have been observing. The coming age of space flight will put our math and our observations alike to laboratory test for the very first time in history.

The crew of the first interplanetary rocket will be history's first true experimental astronomers.

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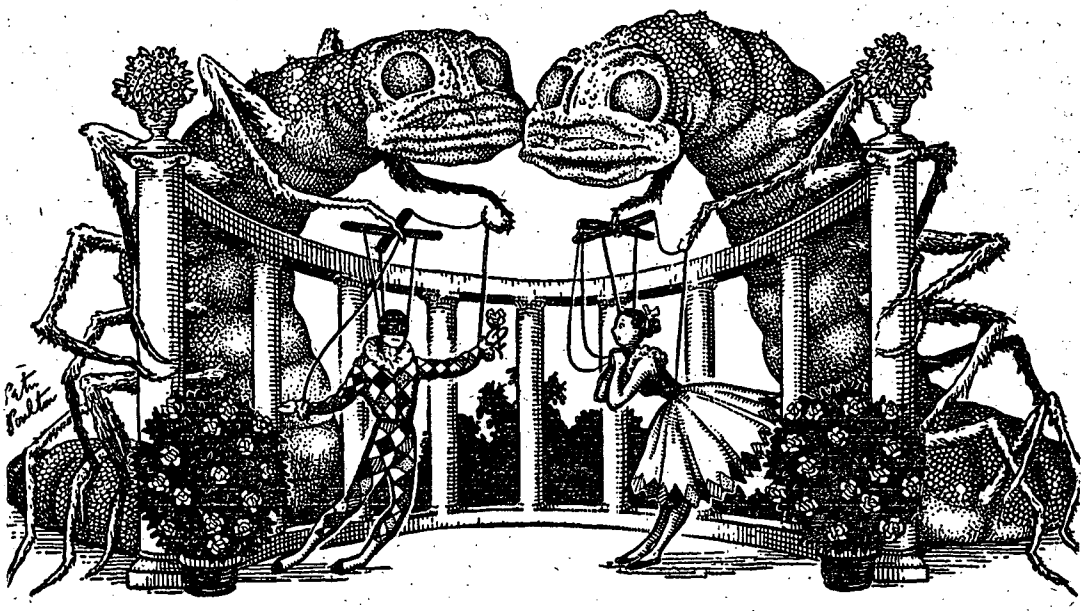

Lesson in Survival

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG

The play is the Tragedy Man,
Its hero the Conqueror Worm.
—Poe

SCHOOL was out. The dismissal bell tolled, and the children rushed in delight from the classroom, and went careening and shouting down garden paths bright with blue and yellow flowers. Overhead a cheery noonday sun beamed down on the emerging schoolmaster, a tall, dark-haired young man whose eyes followed his retreating charges with a warm and eager gratefulness.

Brian Andrews enjoyed teaching, but not on such a day as this. It is a strain to change one's occupation at a moment's notice, but fishing was not an occupation to Brian. It was as natural as breathing. There were red and yellow trout flies pinned to his hat, and a supple bamboo rod had come to life in his hand.

He flicked it as he strode along, counting his blessings one by one. He was free, and independent, and young. He liked his job, and the quiet, dreamy little town with its cloistered air of belonging to an earlier, less mechanized age. He liked to cross the village green and slap the big antique fire-bell opposite the war monument, eliciting a hollow boom, and he liked to go padding along Main Street in his moccasin shoes.

"There's the new young schoolmaster! A college man, but you'd never think it

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to look at him."

Then there was Jenny Fleming. It hadn't taken him long to get to know Jenny well enough to tease her about her freckles while she unwrapped sandwiches on a shady bank, and made light of his attempts to kiss her.

He supposed he'd soon have to write off "free," and be content to remain resolutely independent.

The best thing about the trout stream was its nearness. He had only to cross a deep-elbowed road and ascend a red clay bank to plunge into the leafy green solitude of a truly enchanted stretch of woodland. Enchanted in every way. Jenny would be waiting for him with a luncheon basket beside a willow-shadowed pool, and further down the stream the children would be fishing with worms.

HE WAS quite sure the laughter of the children wouldn't bring the schoolroom back. It would be the completely natural laughter of youngsters at play, freed for the moment from all adult stuffiness and tyranny.

He caught his breath when he actually saw her waiting for him by the pool. She'd removed her stockings and gone wading in the cool, sparkling water, and now she was sitting on the bank drawing her stockings on again.

He went whistling up to her, picked up the lunch basket and looked inside.

"Ham sandwiches," he said. "What could be nicer?"

She did not get up to snatch the basket from him and mingle her laughter with his. She simply leaned back against a slanting willow tree, her eyes searching his face in troubled concern.

"Sit down, Brian," she said. "I want to talk to you."

Surprised, he sat down beside her on the sloping bank. "Hungry men make poor listeners, honeybunch." He smiled in mock distress. "Don't say I didn't warn you."

She said without smiling: "Brian, the planes went over again yesterday."

All of the levity went out of Brian Andrews' eyes. He stared down at the shadowed pool, his mouth suddenly dry.

"I didn't hear them," he said, quickly. "I was busy all day."

"Not too busy to know that every man, woman and child in Fairview is under sentence of death. How can you make yourself forget we're living on borrowed time."

"Just a minute now—"

"It's true, isn't it?" she persisted.

"True or false, you've got to shut your mind to it. If you don't it will darken the sunlight for you."

"Is that your secret, Brian? Have you shut your mind?"

"I can avoid thinking about it for days at a stretch," he told her. "I keep remembering I came to Fairview to take a teaching job, and go fishing, and fall in love with you. The simple truth keeps me sane."

"How sane, Brian? Subconsciously you're in bad shape, just as the rest of us are. It doesn't really help not to be honest about it."

"You're forgetting what a big country this is," he told her. "The planes can't bomb every isolated village, every tiny cluster of houses. Even if they could, bombing on that scale would boomerang. They'd expose themselves to retaliation on a scale which would make interesting source material for future historians—of another intelligent species."

She looked at him steadily for a moment, with understanding and a kind of pity, as if she herself had once clung as tenaciously to hope, and believed quite as firmly that the smaller villages would be spared.

"It may not come tomorrow," she said. "It may not come for a year. Yes, we'll have time to pretend. Tell me—what in the future would you prize most highly? A single long month of waiting? Two?"

He said with stubborn pride: "Fairview itself. If we cling with courage to what we have here, we can face the

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future without fear. That in itself is a victory—perhaps the only true victory mankind can ever know."

"We've lived in Fairviews too long!" she said. "We did not see the danger until it was too late."

"What good would seeing the danger have done?" he asked. "We know now that man will never succeed in controlling his own destiny. What would you have had our best minds do?"

She laughed suddenly. Her laughter rang out defiant and challenging in the peaceful wood.

"Every age brings a new approach to reality, Brian," she answered. "The Atomic Age brought tools so bright we should have found in them the answer to all of our problems. We should have used our genius to banish war forever."

HE LOOKED at her, amazed by her vehemence, sensing for the first time a depth of eloquence in her thinking which challenged his own reasoned convictions at a vital point.

"You'll have to admit we've tried," he said. "We've tried desperately hard to—follow through."

"Not hard enough," she said. "A race can only be judged by its success."

"Then our race has been judged," he said. "It has failed, and the judgment is in, and nothing can be changed. I still say that Fairview can give us courage."

Jenny shook her head. "Only because, when you walk in its quiet streets, you think of the men who once struggled to build ten thousand other Fairviews, each new and each different. If you go back and try to stand where your ancestors stood, your illusions will start to crumble."

"I take it you don't think Fairview is the answer." He forced laughter into his voice. "I haven't noticed any crumbling. Honestly I haven't. If I dropped a trout fly lightly on that pool, and caught a two-pounder, my happiness would be complete."

"You only think it would. You can never shut out the roar of the planes going over, Brian. We had the tools, but we lacked the boldness really to try."

Brian stood up suddenly, staring down at Jenny Fleming sitting on the bank, the sunlight bright on her berry-brown shoulders.

"I still say that Fairview is a positive good in itself." His voice had lost none of its confidence. "We're lucky to be young, and in Fairview. Let the great bombers come. Their wings will cast no shadow for me while I can go on remembering there are speckled trout in that pool, and that you are very beautiful."

"Brian—".

"I have my work, and it is good work. Teaching eager young minds to explore the buried past of the earth, to grasp the almost miraculous beauty of its mountains, rivers and fossils. That's what I like most about Fairview. We still have blackboards. We still have reading, writing and arithmetic. But you can also start early on the really important things.

"Every kid in Fairview with an eager, inquiring mind can use the classroom telescope, and look out across space at the tunneling stars and the Great Nebula in Andromeda."

"It is good work, Brian. But if Fairview should be bombed—"

He bent suddenly, and helped her to her feet. "Fairview will not be bombed," he said.

She laid a finger on his lips. "We've argued enough," she said.

He nodded in quick agreement. "Come on, let's dance!"

"If we had some music—"

"We'll dance anyway. Shall we make it a waltz?"

"All right, Brian."

It was no more than a faint, distant humming at first, like the drowsy murmur of bees in a noonday glade. Bees drowsy with nectar, too sluggish to be dangerous.

They danced on the cool bank, around and around in mock solemnity, hardly aware of the sound, never associating it with danger until it was suddenly thun-

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derous in their ears.

They looked up then and saw the flight of jet bombers screaming across the sky, huge and vulture-black and wobbling a little with the weight of their bomb loads. They looked up and saw the bomb descending. Incredibly tiny it seemed, like a flickering dust mote that persisted in its dancing until the sun's glare claimed it.

They flattened themselves just as the silence gave way to a rumbling and then to a roaring. There were flashes of light between the trees, a vast flickering, a reddening of the entire forest. Then silence again, complete, mind-numbing.

In stunned horror Brian raised himself, and saw Jenny Fleming's limp body lying motionless at his feet. He was aware of pain, and a tumultuous stirring deep within his own body as if something imprisoned in his flesh were struggling furiously to free itself.

Shivering, he closed his eyes, then opened them quickly. The body of his companion had begun to shatter, to break into many gleaming pieces. Like a brittle mold of over-hardened clay it crumbled and flew apart, the arms splintering into fragments, the face separating itself from the rest of the head, and rolling down the bank into the pool. The face did not immediately sink, but continued to stare up masklike for an instant through a deepening film of water, as if puzzled by something it could not quite understand.

From the fragments on the bank a long, glistening shape crawled its bulging, many-faceted eyes probing the forest gloom. Had there been human eyes to watch the shape would have seemed to move with a dignity and grace absurd in a creature so lowly.

But there were no human eyes in the forest shadows. Neither were there human ears to hear it say: "The play is over, Chica Maca. You are inflicting upon yourself quite unnecessary torment."

[*Turn page*]

Round-Up Pete Says: Nobody ever got hurt on the corners of a square deal—

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The creature paused, then went on: "You gave a magnificent performance! You lived the part as it was meant to be lived!"

Chica Maca awoke to reality then, completely. He detached himself from the many manipulative props controlling the eyes, lips, vocal organs and limbs of the artificial man body, and crawled swiftly forth. For a moment he lay motionless in the shadows, his many-faceted eyes acknowledging with pleasure the admiration of his teaching associate Raca Clacan. Then he moved with a dignity and a grace peculiarly masculine to the edge of the stage, and stared down over the bright lights at his student audience.

THE students were just beginning to stir, to awaken as he had done, from the bright compelling magic of the stage to prosaic reality. They lay motionless in their classroom tunnels, a glistening sea of upturned heads, and supine bodies, packed so closely into the vast hall they seemed almost to be one great crawling organism.

Chica-Maca stared down with a deep satisfaction. The drama reconstruction had taken many days of patient research, but certainly it had been worth the effort. In education there could be no substitute for the archaeological drama. Act it out! When the characters were those of a long-vanished intelligent species, debating great issues of survival, the historical lesson could not fail to be spectacularly high-lighted.

A Masterpiece of reconstruction, truly a masterpiece! He thought of the sound recordings of man speech excavated from caverns in the earth sealed from within by a heat so terrific it had melted the surface rocks. He remembered how difficult it was to preserve all of the semantic overtones and fine shadings when such recordings were revamped as passages of dramatic dialogue couched in the infinitely more subtle speech idioms of a more advanced species.

He looked about the immense revolving stage, and in his mind's eye saw the schoolhouse once more turned toward the audience and himself emerging in the artificial man body, the smaller bodies with their child actors skipping away before him into the woods.

He had lived the man part so completely he had actually believed in the village all through the play. The village had existed as a richly experienced reality in his own mind, and in that way he had made the village seem real to the audience, had saved the extra cost of an actual stage reconstruction.

Even without the village, the schoolhouse and the stretch of woodland had made the production a costly one. But surely, surely, it had been worth the cost! His students now knew more about the last days of man than they could have learned from twenty or thirty carefully prepared lectures.

Chica-Maca's eyes quivered, and he half-arose on his twentieth pair of legs, assuming an almost manlike posture on the stage. It seemed only fitting to him that, at the end of such a play, a species that had conquered should thus pay its respects to a species that had passed.

Curt Temple pits his slim Earth knowledge against the most perfect intelligence in the cosmos to save the world—and the woman he loves! Be sure to read THE GODS HATE KANSAS, a novel by JOSEPH J. MILLARD in November

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No Land of Nod

By SHERWOOD SPRINGER

A world in ashes knows no law but . . . necessity!

FAR to the south, in the direction of the Baldwin Hills, a wild dog howled lonesomely. The sound died and was not repeated.

The bearded man, his ears straining to register the slightest whisper, stirred uneasily at the sound. He turned his head and listened intently, half fearful he might have missed, in that moment of distraction, some faint cry from the interior of the shadowed house behind him.

The silence was unmarred, and the man turned his eyes once more to the unbroken gloom of the valley that stretched for miles below and beyond

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him toward the sea. Twenty-one years. From how many other hills on how many other countless nights had those same tired eyes sought painfully for a distant pinpoint message that somewhere again man was challenging the night? No more. Hope dies slowly, but it dies.

It was a Valley of Shapes. Hollow as the bleached shell of a long-dead crustacean, the city stretched away into the darkness, mile upon mile, a vast decaying monument to the memory of his race. Already, he knew, structures were crumbling, man's pretty little lawns and gardens had long ago vanished in rank jungles of growth; trees, quick to root in pavement cracks, grew fat and ruthless, bullying the concrete into defeated fragments.

Water from a ruptured main had undermined buildings on the fabled Strip just below him, had burst forth from the rubble and gouged a new, ever-deepening channel toward the Pacific. How many centuries, the man wondered, would nature require to complete its erasure of the silent metropolis? Westward toward La Cienega his eye caught a faint patch of white, dimly reflecting the cold light of the Milky Way. He knew what lay there—and everywhere from the uplands to the sea. It was a Valley of Bones.

Somehow, he knew it was a world of bones. Not always had he believed that. Not twenty-one years ago when he and Ann had stepped out of the space room at Cal Tech to find a city of death; not twenty years ago after their heartbreaking eight-thousand mile trek across the States in search of survivors; not even sixteen years ago when he still gazed out over the blue Pacific at intervals, scanning the horizon half fearfully, half hopefully, for a ship from . . . over there. Somewhere people must be living, just as their ancestors had lived for thousands of years . . . in the land of the enemy, perhaps, waiting to come and claim the western world they had destroyed. But as the months wheeled away into years, and the sea remained desolate as a grave, the realization grew in him that he had known the truth from the very beginning, known it while denying it blindly with every fiber of his being.

He and Ann were the last people on earth.

AS THE bearded one waited on the shadowy slope above the valley, he pondered once more the baffling destiny that had selected him, out of all the millions, to become the second Adam. He remembered as if it were yesterday the time he had first put it into words. . . .

"Doesn't it strike you as funny, Ann," he had mused, "that an ordinary guy like me gets picked to become the father of a race?"

"Does the choice bother you?" Ann had quipped.

"I'm serious," he persisted. "Sometimes I think one of God's file clerks must have come up with the wrong name."

"Why do you say that?"

"You know what I mean. What cockeyed standards could possibly rate me this job? I never won any medals. Nobody ever called me 'the brain.' Never went to college. Read western stories and science fiction when I was a kid instead of doing homework. Didn't go to church after I grew up, or think much about it. Never killed anybody, of course, or kicked a dog, but I guess I did plenty of other things God would have raised his eyebrow about if he'd been watching. And physically, you've got to admit that plain Jim Clay doesn't look much like Charles Atlas. Seems to me I got in here on a fluke."

"Jim!" She grasped his shoulders sharply, her eyes levelly trapping his. "That's nonsense. In the first place, you *are* here, and the choice, if choice it was, has been made, and all the self-deprecation in the world isn't going to give our descendants a different ancestor."

"No, but—"

"Has it occurred to you," she went on

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doggedly, "that maybe it makes a great deal of sense? You said something just now that reveals more about you than you realize. Kicking a dog, in your mind, is as heinous as murder. That's your great quality, Jim—kindness. Tell me, the civilization we knew—why is it lying around us as dead as . . . Gomorrah? Those great brains you admire were building atomic piles, computing machines and planes that flew faster than sound, but were they doing anything about intolerance and selfishness and the greed for power? It seems to me trifles like 'loving thy neighbor' were sort of lost in the shuffle. Maybe God finally decided to let man wipe himself out and then start all over again—this time with the little things . . . like kindness."

As It Was . . .

THIS is the story that couldn't be printed. In a world faced by the possibility of human annihilation via atomic cataclysm, many authors have toyed with the idea of a single couple being left to re-establish the human race. This concept immediately challenges certain taboos, around which all writers have skated as on thin ice. Yet it is an honest situation which is a possibility, if not a probability. Moreover, anyone who accepts the Adam and Eve version of Creation must eventually face it. So here it is, presented honestly, soberly, decently. We think you'll find it a moving piece of writing.

—*The Editor*

A cold wind from the sea began to stir the leaves of the eucalyptus tree beside the house. The bearded man shivered slightly and drew his jacket collar more snugly about his throat. He glanced up at the night sky, dusty with swarming stars. Even the heavens were different then, he thought. Back in '53 the moon itself had difficulty getting through sometimes. He smiled grimly. Man had solved the smog problem at last.

Twenty-one years. His mind sped down the long time track to that morning he had read the want ad in the Los Angeles Times.

> MAN: 30-40, no dependents, for scientific experiment. Must pass physical. Call FO-9-6668.

Cal Tech, it developed, was pushing research into the field of space travel and its physical and psychological effects on the human system. Hermetically sealed chambers had been prepared to simulate as closely as possible the interior of a rocket between worlds, and the plan called for two people to spend three weeks under observation therein.

JIM CLAY had got the job, and he had met Ann Banning. Ann was an accomplished research scientist in her own right who had insisted she be permitted to make the test. She was 37; he was 39. How little importance he had attached to those figures at the time, yet how desperately serious they became later when destiny began its mocking game.

How symbolic was the closing of the air lock that shut them off from the world of May, 1953, the civilization they were never to see again. Tanks were rumbling on three fronts. In Germany, in the northwest reaches of Pakistan, and in Manchuria men were falling with hot lead in their bellies. There was no war, of course, but the regiments who lay sprawled in the fox holes might have argued that point. Elsewhere the peoples of the world waited, scarcely breathing at times . . . waited for the bombs. When would they drop? The atom bombs, the hydrogen bombs, the dreaded nerve gas? Fear crept like a serpent among the nations. Who would be first to strike? Who would be stricken?

The answer soared in a high arc across the Pole on the night of May 7, three days after Ann and Jim had entered the space room.

One bomb.

That was all. It exploded just south of Berkeley, California, on the edge of the bay. Approximately .071 of a second

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later the world ended for two and a half billion people.

The scientists had erred. The bomb had been a gesture, a warning; the nerve gas it contained was a modified type. Thousands would be temporarily paralyzed but few fatalities would result. America must be shown how vulnerable it was.

By what deadly miscalculation the catalyst was unforeseen the world would never know. But catalyst there was, and the resulting chain reaction in the atmosphere swept the globe with the speed of light. From America to the Orient, from pole to pole, in ships, in homes, in offices and factories, in the deepest caverns, wherever the breath of an atom linked air to air, the blight struck. Paralysis. The nerve system congealed, lungs struggled vainly to function, and suffocation was followed by death—quickly in most cases, days later in others. Only the comparative handful of humanity who happened to be in pressure cabins, submerged submarines, air locks and similar sealed compartments escaped the initial wave of devastation. But these had no way of knowing the doom that awaited them. Planes landed, underseas craft surfaced, locks were opened. And death was waiting. . . .

Strangely enough, man alone of all the animal kingdom found breathing fatal. The oxygen content of the atmosphere remained undisturbed and, although several other species among the higher mammals were temporarily affected, scarcely a death resulted.

Gradually, as the days passed, the deadly vapor dissipated. The slow absorption by soil, sea and stone demonstrated once more nature's wily resourcefulness in coping with unnatural and contra-survival developments. By the fourth week in May the atmosphere's lethal content had dropped well within the tolerance level.

LIKE the spinning facets in a kaleidoscope memories flared momentarily, then scurried to merge with other memories in a spiraling montage, as the bearded man waited on the hillside. The unforgettable bewilderment as he and Ann had emerged from the space room to find a laboratory peopled with corpses, the rapidly mounting horror as they sped from room to room, and finally the numbing shock as they stepped outdoors and their ears registered the most stunning fact of all. The campus, and the great city beyond, lay wrapped in an incredible, unnatural silence.

Their search for survivors in the days that followed was grimly dogged, but the mounting stench of death that hung like a pall over the Los Angeles kettle drove them finally to flight. Northward over the mountains they went, transportation presenting little difficulty. Automobiles by the thousands were to be had for the taking. The material world was theirs. Many vehicles, of course, had been damaged or demolished in final crashes, but the number was comparatively small. Occasionally they encountered road blocks caused by multiple collisions but they were able to bypass these in most cases, or as a last resort, they could always trudge past on foot and take possession of another car farther on—as they did when gasoline ran low.

On through Bakersfield, Fresno and Modesto, with hope dying within them. The San Francisco area was fetid, and they realized without crossing the bridge there would be no life there. As they turned right toward Berkeley, determined to push north and eastward across the Sierras, they discovered the crater. It was that, coupled with the threatening communique of the enemy revealed in one of the last editions of now defunct newspapers, that had enabled Ann to formulate an hypothesis which explained the disaster. But its scope was still far from suspected. There must be life to the east. Telephones and radios were dead, it was true, but as evidence that was not necessarily conclusive.

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He could write, the man thought, a new Genesis of their wanderings during the year that followed. Over Donner Pass they went, down into Reno, the long trek across the wastelands to the east, St. Louis, Chicago, and on across Pennsylvania to the mighty tomb that was now New York. New England. On their return through the South despair rode with them and a realization of the stupendous responsibility to the race that might be theirs. They began to discuss it as mile after mile of desolation disappeared behind them.

"Have you tried to think," Ann asked him one day, "what it means if we've been wrong all along, and the rest of the world is just like this?"

He grinned wryly, making an effort to speak lightly. "Of course. It means we're elected Adam and Eve II . . . and with no Garden of Eden."

"I'm quite serious, Jim. We've got to begin thinking—as no one has ever had to think before."

He eyed her with assumed incomprehension, reluctant to tackle the problem that was beginning to loom in his own mind. "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. It's possible that we're the last people alive."

"There must be others *somewhere*." He emphasized the word stubbornly.

"I hope so." She laid a hand on his arm. "But, Jim, we must begin thinking on the basis of facts we know. We've found no one. It's been almost a year. If the people in Europe or Asia survived, why haven't they sent ships or planes to investigate our silence? Why haven't we been able to pick up foreign broadcasts on battery radios?"

"Maybe their planes did come over," he countered. "Maybe we just weren't in the right place at the right time to see them."

"You don't believe that, and you know I don't believe it, either." Her fingers tightened on his arm. "Jim," she said in a low voice as his eyes left the road for a moment to meet hers, "let's face it. Our time is running out. I've given this more thought than you know. I'll be thirty-nine years old in the fall."

She fell silent for a while and then suddenly the man saw with terrible clarity what she meant. "That means . . . " he began, then his voice trailed off.

"Four or five years," she finished for him. "Seven or eight at the most."

THEY drove on in silence for a time, each wrapped in his own thoughts. Mississippi lowland was rolling by. Meridian lay behind them; its bodies, no longer either black or white, had reached equality at last, the equality of bones. Furred and feathered scavengers, insects and decomposition, nature's efficient decontamination crew, had completed their work, and once again the air was sweet.

"We're no longer children," she resumed at last. "And we're facing something no one ever faced before. I've learned to love you, Jim. It wasn't hard to do. In fact, I can scarcely see how I could have avoided it under the circumstances. We've spent about eleven months together and it looks as if there's no logical alternative to our living together in the future. Maybe it's time we began to think in terms of that future."

Jim was silent for many minutes. "It's a funny thing, Ann," he said finally. "I can remember reading several science fiction yarns long, long ago. They ended with a man and a girl gazing into the sunset, or maybe the dawn, the last two people on earth, or the only two people on some planet, and they were looking forward brightly to founding a new race. The stories always ended there, I mean, and it was sort of frustrating. I wanted to know what happened after that, and it almost seemed as if the writers never had the courage to tell you."

Ann smiled grimly. "Now you're going to get your answers the hard way."

He resisted the impulse to grin as he went on doggedly, "I mean, here we are alone in the world. After a while we

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have two or three children. They grow up. Then what?"

She hesitated before answering. "That's a decision we have to make," she said gently, "*before* we have the two or three children."

He shook his head.

"But suppose we do decide to have them. What happens then? Where are *their* children coming from? You can't mate brother and sister. Look at the idiots that have been born just because cousins married."

"That's the decision I mentioned. Genetics wasn't my field but I know a little about the subject. You're not altogether right about the idiots. Idiots have been born to cousin matings, I'll grant you, but thousands have also been born to couples who were not even distantly related. Heredity is a matter of genes, passed down from generation to generation, and whether your child is an idiot or not depends mostly on whether the black gene of idiocy runs in both blood lines. If it runs in yours, and the girl is also your cousin, it will probably be found in hers too. A mating, in that case, would be almost sure to bring out the worst.

"But suppose you took healthy, intelligent parents who were both free of black genes. The chances are their children would be superior to the ones born from the average marriage. And if you bred these superior children there's no reason to suppose the third generation would be a bit less superior. A dominant strain strengthens itself. Surely you remember something of what the farmers and breeders were doing with animals and crops?"

"You almost make it sound all right," Jim admitted. "But how do we know about these black genes? You and I might be crawling with them."

Ann was forced to smile at his words. "We'll see. When we get to Jackson I want you to find a bookstore or library. I think we can get the information we need, and then we can take inventory."

She put her head on his shoulder.

JACKSON, like scores of other cities they had seen, bore desolate black scars of the fires that had raged in the days that had followed the bomb. But the business section, one of the most modern in the South, was, strangely enough, almost intact. While Ann was busily scanning store fronts, Jim slowly piloted their vehicle along the almost deserted main streets.

"There!" she cried suddenly. "Stop, Jim."

The huge gasoline tanker they had picked up in Birmingham as a solution to the increasing problem of fuel evaporation, ground to a halt and, as Jim set the brake, Ann climbed down from the cab and made for the doorway of a bookstore. When she reappeared thirty minutes later she carried seven or eight volumes under her arm.

They lunched on interminable canned chicken and canned fruit and soon were rumbling off again toward the west, with Ann deeply engrossed in the books. Occasionally, as she skimmed over page after page, she would look up and comment on some information she encountered.

"How much do you know about Cleopatra?" she asked, after a long interval of reading.

"Well," Jim smiled hesitantly, "she was a little before my time, but I hear she was a pretty sharp tomato."

"It might interest you to know that the parents of your 'sharp tomato' were brother and sister."

"They were?" There was frank astonishment in Jim's tone.

"They were. And not only that, but *their* parents were brother and sister. And so on back for six generations."

"My God," Jim said in awe. "How did they get away with it?"

"It wasn't a matter of getting away with it. It was accepted as custom among the Pharaohs. The rulers in ancient Peru felt the same way about it, too, and married their own sisters whenever it was possible. And if you want to go back to Bible days, Abraham mar-

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ried his half-sister, and Moses, his aunt."

Jim digested it slowly. "Sounds immoral to me."

"That's why we've got to talk about it," Ann went on. "We've got to change our whole idea of what's moral and what's immoral. We have to realize that moral standards are arbitrary and change when customs and conditions change. A year ago there were a hundred and sixty million people in this country, and there were laws that said cousins couldn't marry. Now there are two people, and to say that conditions have changed is putting it mildly. As a matter of fact, there's no one left even to issue us a marriage license."

"So we save two bucks."

"You see! You don't seem to have a bit of trouble adjusting to that. It's just another step to what lies ahead for our children."

"Maybe you're right," Jim admitted grudgingly, but he was reluctant to relinquish his deeply embedded feeling.

They drove on toward Shreveport, and Ann resumed her reading. The sun had set and dusk was obscuring the landscape as they entered the outskirts of a small Louisiana town. Jim soon slowed the tanker to a crawl, his eyes peering ahead for the familiar sign. It was a lesson they had learned long ago, in searching for places to spend the night. The bomb had struck Berkeley shortly after midnight; it had been 3 A.M. on the east coast, and 2 A.M. here. The vast majority of Americans east of the Rockies had died in their sleep. Jim and Ann had found by grim experience that there was one place that invariably provided beds free from grisly remains. Furniture stores.

He spotted the sign a few moments later, under the once proud lettering, "J. J. Beauregard & Sons," and Jim pulled to the curb.

That night, while rows of bedsteads and dusty bureaus threw jet shadows on the walls, Ann and Jim sat near their gasoline camp lantern and took the strangest inventory in history.

"It amounts to this," Ann explained. "Are we going to become the Adam and Eve of a new race of human beings, or will we just live out our lives as the last two people on earth, and then let the dogs and the ants take over? I know little of your folks and you know less of mine. If it develops there is a serious genetic fault in our blood lines, it may be far better to let the whole thing drop right here, rather than pass on untold misery to unborn generations."

"Seems to me," Jim put in, "people have been having babies for a good many years, and I can't remember anybody who ever got so worked up over whether they *ought* to have babies as we are. We'll work out our own problems; let our children handle theirs."

"Jim!" she said sharply. "That's not the point. We've been over this before, and you know it's not our children I'm thinking about. We could have babies just as other people did, without considering the possibilities. But those other people's children grew up, remember, and then married someone who lived down the street or over in Burbank. Well, there is no Burbank now, and there is no down the street. You can see what I mean. It's the third generation we've got to think of."

"O.K.," Jim acquiesced resignedly, as he fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette. "Let's get on with it."

ANN leaned over and kissed him gently on the cheek. "My poor, long-suffering Adam."

They got on with it. Ann opened one of the books to a page she had dog-eared, the beginning of a long list of the particular genes that science had demonstrated were responsible for most of the hereditary ills of mankind.

"For once," Ann began, "we must be completely honest with ourselves. If either of us is, or has been, affected by any of the conditions listed here we must make a note of it. Our parents and

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grandparents, too—let's rack our memory of them, and other members of our family trees. Think hard while I call the roll.

"Diabetes."

Their answers were both negative.

"Insanity, or feeblemindedness."

Again negative.

"Epilepsy. There seems to be some dispute about this one's being hereditary, but let's not skip it."

"Nope," Jim said. "No epilepsy." Ann added her "No" and they went on.

"Deaf-mutism."

Negative.

"Spastic paralysis."

Negative.

"Hemophilia."

"No royalty in my blood," Jim grinned. "Strictly peasant."

Ann returned his grin and then continued through the other serious diseases and on into the almost interminable array of minor hereditary defects.

It was revealed that Ann had affixed ear lobes. Her father and one grandfather had been partly bald. Jim confessed partial color blindness. His father had been hard of hearing late in life and a brother had astigmatism. It was odd that the single "black" gene common to both their families was one considered relatively rare. Webbed toes. Jim recalled two cases, an aunt and a cousin, who were born with that peculiarity involving the two smallest toes on each foot. Ann's mother had had six-toed feet, the small toes and the supernumerary toes growing as one.

"That's a dominant qualified characteristic," Ann pointed out. "Even though neither of us shows it, it may pop up later on. Do you think," she managed a mock plaintiveness, "that we should risk it? Picture the world five thousand years from now—two billion people. All web-footed." Her laughter held a new note, and Jim, who had not quite shared her tension throughout the inventory, suddenly perceived the strain she had been under.

"Maybe they could develop it," he said, keeping his face stony. "If they could grow webbed arms, they could learn to fly."

Then, as she threw him one brief incredulous glance, he, too, broke down, and their laughter echoed together from the shadow fretted walls.

THEY pushed rapidly westward now, their objective clear in mind. Fort Worth, El Paso, Phoenix, across the hot desert miles to Indio, and finally, a full three weeks from that night in J. J. Beauregard's, they limped into the huge sprawling silence that was Los Angeles.

They had seen cows grazing along the San Gabriel River a few miles to the east, and, after two days of reconnoitering among the fire-ravaged ruins of the metropolis, they decided to return to that area. There, in a modest but well-built rancho, they set up their home. Water still flowed in the mains, and a super food market stood undamaged on the highway a scant half mile to the north. There was neither gas nor electricity but an enclosed patio provided a barbecue pit for cooking purposes, and within a few days Jim was able to locate and install a gasoline powered home lighting plant. The fuel itself, he knew, would be available in almost inexhaustible quantities in the storage tanks that dotted this region, after more accessible sources had run dry.

Months sped away. New problems of wresting a living from a deserted and non-producing world confronted them almost daily, and it seemed to Jim and Ann that they were eternally faced with so much more to do than there was time for. Many evenings were spent in study. Ann had amassed a comprehensive library of technical and reference books, and, at her urging, Jim joined her in adding to their store of knowledge. One of the books they carefully devoured was a big leather-bound volume on "Obstetrics."

"Doctor" Jim Clay delivered their first baby the following summer. A girl.

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They named her Esther after Ann's mother, and Ann pretended disappointment at finding the baby didn't have six toes. Jim, on his part, stroked his chin thoughtfully after the ordeal was over, and seemed deliberating a momentously grave decision.

"Do you suppose," he mused, eyeing the husky infant speculatively, "they really do bounce?"

When Charlotte, their second child, was born seventeen months later, it was a different story. Complications arose which taxed Jim's knowledge and resources to their limit. For weeks Ann lay on the verge of death, and Jim, desperately drawing on the almost superhuman stamina with which he suddenly seemed endowed, grappled night and day with the malignant forces that threatened to break up humanity's tiny nucleus. He pored over the medical books, caught his sleep in brief naps, and never left the room containing Ann and the two babies, except for the briefest of intervals. He had tethered one of their cows in a grassy patch near the patio, insuring a supply of fresh milk, and other necessities were close at hand.

Finally, late in January, Jim, haggard now, knew the gruelling battle had been won. Ann's fever abated suddenly one morning and she awoke with the ghost of the old sparkle in her eye. She reached for his hand and pulled him closer.

"Bend down, you old quack," she smiled wanly. "Put that thermometer away. I want to be kissed."

During Ann's convalescence and in the months that followed, some measure of their old spirit returned. They were able to joke once more about their tasks and minor setbacks. But somehow there was a difference now. Underneath, both knew, there was an indefinable feeling of unsureness, of sham, about their jocularity. From month to month they postponed, nor even mentioned, the discussion that both knew would be inevitable. The foetus of fear had begun to grow in both their hearts.

CHARLOTTE was two years old when it happened. Ann, almost from that first day of horror nearly five years before, had realized the importance of keeping some record of time, and she had scrupulously marked off the days in her little notebook throughout all the months they had been together. During her period of delirium, of course, the task had fallen to Jim, and although secretly he could never be certain he hadn't missed a day here and there, to Ann he maintained steadfastly that he hadn't been remiss.

Thus it was, when Ann entered the room bearing a huge frosty cake and announced, "Gather 'round, everybody. Charlotte is two!" Jim smiled slyly to himself and added for no ears but his own: "Give or take a day."

That evening, after the children were asleep, Ann stood by the bay window and watched torrential winter rain turn the slope in front of the rancho into a pattern of rushing yellow rivers.

"Our time is running out, Jim," she said quietly as he joined her at the window. "The roads are breaking up with every rain." As his eyes followed hers out into the darkness and storm he sensed the solemn allegory her tone conveyed. The world of man was crumbling, the ties that bound them to civilization were fraying and snapping one by one, and their hopes, their faith in the Plan, these, too, had strangely dimmed.

"It's fear, Jim!" she said suddenly and fiercely. "Fear. We've got to drive it out." She turned to him, a grim light of decision in her eyes. "We haven't talked of it. We've been thinking of ourselves. Oh, Lord, the time we've wasted. We must hurry, Jim. We've got to try again." She buried her face on his chest, but he was able to hear the whisper that followed. "We've got to have a boy, dear God. We've got to have a boy."

His arms encircled her, and they stood like, that for seemingly interminable minutes as the rain beat against the glass and fled in defeated rivulets outside the sill.

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"You mean more to me, darling," Jim said at last, "then posterity does. I almost lost you once, remember?"

"I know," she murmured. Then she looked up and met his eyes. "It's been my fault. It seemed so much easier to put things off and forget. But we're forgetting, too, there's Esther and Charlotte now. What of them? You see, we have to go on. I hope we're not too late."

Jim knew it was useless to try to sway her. . . .

Their third child was born the week before Thanksgiving, 1958, five and one-half years after the bomb. Esther, now a precocious girl of almost four, proved of much more help than Jim had dreamed possible. She performed quickly the little chores and errands that had distracted the "Doctor" when Charlotte had been born; in addition she attended to the needs of her younger sister almost singlehandedly.

But at best it was another nightmare. Ann fought for life with a dogged tenacity, and Jim, his forebodings crystalized, knew that this would be their last. At dawn on the third day a thin wail heralded the arrival of the new world's fifth bit of humanity. Ann, in a brief period of consciousness, sought Jim's eyes, appealing for an answer to the mute question burning deep in her own. He smiled reassuringly, but the message she read there was not to be concealed by his dissembling.

The baby was another girl.

ANN survived, but she needed surgery that Jim had not the skill to perform. This time she did not recover. The next five years of her life were spent almost entirely in bed and in a wheelchair Jim had secured for her. The children were growing up, however, and she took over the teaching duties of the household, as if her handicap were of no import. The bedroom was converted into a part-time schoolroom, complete with blackboard, globe, and shelves of books, and five days a week Esther and Charlotte bent studiously over their pursuit of the three R's.

"Books," Ann said to Jim one day, "will be the key to the future, as they are to the past. Adam and Eve had to start from scratch; we have the knowledge of the ages at our fingertips. Reading must not die."

"But—" Jim started to object before he was able to check the protesting voice of his subconscious.

Ann smiled cunningly. "I know what you were going to say, Jim. But you're wrong. I haven't given up." She would say no more, and it was a puzzled man who left the room shortly after. It was his first inkling of the destiny that lay ahead.

Ann died on a day in March that was so beautiful it seemed that Nature had deliberately marshaled all her most priceless handiwork to provide a farewell of superlative loveliness to the departing. After several days of fog and rain the skies had cleared suddenly and only a few fantastically white clouds drifted across a sky of sheerest cobalt. Velvety breezes danced out of the southland, laden with the sweet scents of new spring blooms, and grass and trees vied with each other to see which could provide the more sparkling green background for the vermilion and gold, the crimson, azure and purple of the riotous flowers.

Esther was nine. Intelligent, tall, and performing the work of an adult, she was developed far beyond her years. She had entered that morning with her mother's breakfast, when the latter gestured weakly toward a table.

"Put the tray down, dear," she said. "Go and bring your sisters."

Charlotte and Little Ann, now five, pushed puzzled faces into the room a moment later. It was too early for their customary classes, and Esther, a few steps behind them, had given no reason for the summons.

"Come closer, girls," the mother beckoned. "I have much to say, and you must listen and remember." She closed her eyes a moment and then began,

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while the children stood in a silent semicircle by the bed. She talked in a low voice for a long time, principally to Esther, halting now and again to touch her tongue to her drying lips. Little Ann was whimpering when she had finished, but the two older girls remained dry-eyed, stoically fighting against the impending reality.

"Leave me now for a little while," Ann requested. "I must speak to Jim."

Brown visaged, lean as ever, his sandy hair now sprinkled with gray, Jim strode in a few minutes later, closing the door softly behind him. He crossed to the bed and, with much concern in his eyes, reached for her left wrist.

Ann smiled wanly. "Forget the pulse, Jim. We may not have much time."

He started up as if to turn toward the medicine shelf, but she stopped him quickly.

"No, please! There is something much more important now."

HE LET her pull him down beside her on the bed. Their eyes met for a long moment. Then she spoke in a voice that seemed to come a long way from within and beyond her frail body.

"I've failed you, Jim. We'll never have the son we planned . . . the son the world depended on. I think God must have arranged it this way . . . to see if the race of man had the courage to go on in spite of the failure of the Plan. I've been reading the Bible again, Jim . . . It's still the world's most comforting book. Do you remember in Genesis? 'And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.' Cain found a wife there, and they begat and begat. It's different now. Have you wondered where our girls will go to find husbands this time? Have you?"

Uncomfortable at the trend of her words, Jim sat staring at the tendons on the back of his fist as he tensed and relaxed them at nervous intervals.

"I've failed you, Jim," she repeated. "You must give me your oath you will not fail me. The Plan needs . . . revision."

Incredulous suspicion stirring deep within him, he raised his eyes questioningly to hers.

"We have no land of Nod, Jim. But there will still be a man . . . and, in a few years, a woman . . . three women. You see, God did not intend that our race should perish from . . . the earth."

Ann's voice faltered and a strange grayness began to pervade her face. In sudden fear the man bent closer. "Hold me," she said, barely above a whisper. "It's getting . . . so cold." As Jim's arms tightened about her, the whisper seemed to recede farther and farther into the misty recesses of some fathomless corridor. "Tighter . . ." it seemed to plead from a vast distance. "Tighter . . . tighter. . . ."

Then it was gone, and the graying man could only lie there, choked with a numbing grief that knew no outlet.

Ann was buried in the shadow of the rose arbor behind the house. They held a simple ceremony, with Jim reading from a worn Bible held in taut fingers while the girls stood in a silent row, their arms cradling their flowered tributes. Later Jim laboriously tore up a path of Arizona flagstones to erect a cairn over her grave.

The months sped by. Packs of wild dogs ranging the countryside year by year were growing more ravenous and menacing. The two older girls had become proficient with rifles, and scores of the marauders were slain, but more and more Jim realized they would soon have to move from the unprotected rancho.

He dimly remembered some of the homes he had seen in the Hollywood Hills, and one bright morning he set out on an exploring expedition to the west. The place he chose was perfectly preserved and secure as a fortress. It was perched on a shelf halfway up the hillside, sheer mountain at its back and concrete retaining walls dropping away a full twenty feet to the roadway below.

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Steps leading to the shelf were protected by a heavy grilled gate.

Automobile batteries had long ago become useless, but Jim had rigged a booster to get the vehicles operating. On trips away from the rancho he either left the motor running continuously or simply parked on a sharp grade. A truck was commandeered and prepared for use, and the move begun. The roads, however, had fallen into a hopeless state of disrepair, and the many trips across town were painfully slow. The livestock was also transported, and Jim installed the animals on other shelves below the house. In all, the operation consumed five days.

Little Ann was thirteen now, towheaded, and gangly, but a full adult in the measure of her duties. Cooking was her special love, and for more than a year she had been in full charge of the kitchen and household duties. Charlotte, always more frail than her sisters, was the student. Learning had become a mania with her, and her mother's fine library provided drink for her avidly thirsting brain. At fifteen, she was journal-keeper and barber for the family, musician, dentist and veterinarian, doctor and nurse.

Esther, sixteen now, was fast developing into womanhood. Sun-bronzed and tall, with the wide-spaced gray eyes of her father and the firm chin and rich dark hair of her mother, Esther gave promise of the striking beauty that was soon to be hers. She made little effort, however, to enhance that beauty, preferring, instead, to spend her days at Jim's side, aiding him in the heavier outdoor tasks of gardening, building, repairing, hauling, hunting and caring for the animals and fowl, tasks so necessary for their existence.

As season continued to merge imperceptibly into season in Southern California's characteristic way, Jim fell to seeking solitude under the stars after the long day's labors were completed. For hour after hour he would keep his vigil on the edge of the parapet, his eyes roving the shadowy reaches of the valley while the constellations above him wheeled in slow measured majesty toward the west. "Watching for lights," he had explained, but somehow he knew there would be no lights. His real search lay deep within his own heart, and the parapet was his Gethsemane. It was there he must find an answer, some measure of peace for his troubled soul.

Months passed, and the spirit of Ann began to live for him during those hours of his strange loneliness. At times she seemed so near he felt he could hear her comforting whisper, or if he moved his hand he could touch her warm, smooth skin. Thus, it seemed, that drowsy night in August, that Ann's arms tenderly embraced him and her lips stealthily crept across his cheek until they met and clung to his own. His eyes were closed and somewhere far within him rang a voice in wild, clear song: "Ann . . . Ann. . . ." The kiss ended, but the dream lingered. The girl in his arms was still Ann, but the quiet voice that began speaking was suddenly Esther's.

"I'll be eighteen tomorrow, Jim. I read mother's last letter tonight."

"Letter?" Jim repeated numbly, struggling to distinguish reality from dream.

"You never knew, did you? She wrote a long series of them, and every birthday I've opened one, just as I promised her. Tonight was the last. She taught me so much, Jim . . . how to be a woman, and many things I could never tell you. Above all, she was afraid you would forget a promise. . . ."

In the silence that followed, Jim marveled anew at the indomitable purpose of the woman, at her incredible foresight, even in little things. The letters. And his name. From the very beginning she had taught the girls to address him as Jim. Never dad or father. It had seemed a trifling eccentricity then . . . now the subtle significance emerged in startling clarity.

Esther kissed him lightly once more, and then snuggled close to his breast.

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"You old faker," she murmured. "I believe you really *would* have forgotten. I'm going to see that you don't."

FAR to the west, in the direction of Pacific Palisades, another wild dog sent his mournful howl wafting toward the stars. The bearded man, startled from his revery, turned his head once more to regard the shadowed house behind him. Eucalyptus and jacaranda leaves were quivering and clicking in the west wind, and the man realized suddenly how chill the night had become.

Then abruptly his awareness of all those things vanished.

His eyes had caught the quick thin panel of light from the house that told him a door had been opened and swiftly shut. He leaped up expectantly as a white-frocked figure flew across the lawn.

"Jim, Jim, it's over!" Little Ann gasped as she raced into his arms and hugged him with childish intensity. "Charlotte says you can stop your pacing now, and come in."

"But how is—?" he began, as the teen-ager disengaged herself suddenly and began tugging at his arm.

"Come on," she urged. "Everybody's peachy-dory. Hurry!"

"But tell me—" he persisted, trying to resist her bubbling exuberance, "is it. . . is it a—?"

"Oh!" she trilled, as if surprised at his stupidity. "'Course, it's a boy. What'd you think?"

Jim let himself be led toward the house. A dreamlike current engulfed him and he seemed being borne on the crest of a great river, outward and upward toward the dim reaches of eternity. The parapet and the Valley of Shapes, the sea winds and the crying of wild dogs, the dark vigils and the restless turbulence in his soul, to their last vestige seemed retreating into a distant and forgotten past.

. . . The race of man would live again.

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE

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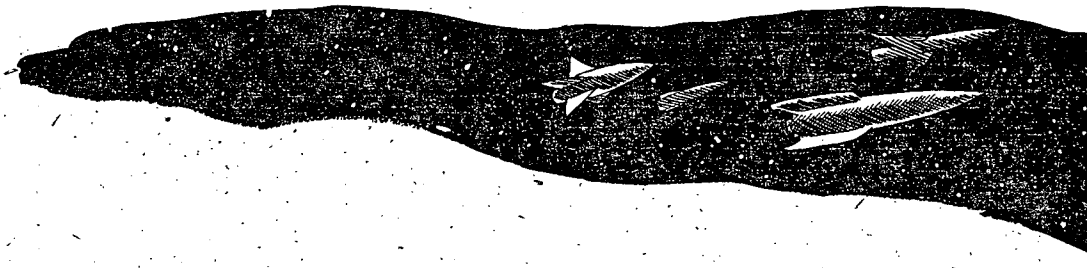

When Haddon returned from the expedition and went to visit the families of his dead buddies, they all asked . . .

What's It Like Out There?

. . . and he couldn't tell them the truth!

A Novelet by EDMOND HAMILTON

I HADN'T wanted to wear my uniform when I left the hospital, but I didn't have any other clothes there and I was too glad to get out to argue about it. But as soon as I got on the local plane I was taking to Los Angeles, I was sorry I had it on.

People gawked at me and began to whisper. The stewardess gave me a special big smile. She must have spoken to the pilot, for he came back and shook hands, and said, "Well, I guess a trip like this is sort of a comedown for *you*."

A little man came in, looked around for a seat, and took the one beside me. He was a fussy, spectacled guy of fifty or sixty, and he took a few minutes to get settled. Then he looked at me, and stared at my uniform and at the little brass button on it that said TWO.

"Why," he said, "you're one of those Expedition Two men!" And then, as though he'd only just figured it out, "Why, you've been to Mars!"

"Yeah," I said. "I was there."

He beamed at me in a kind of wonder.

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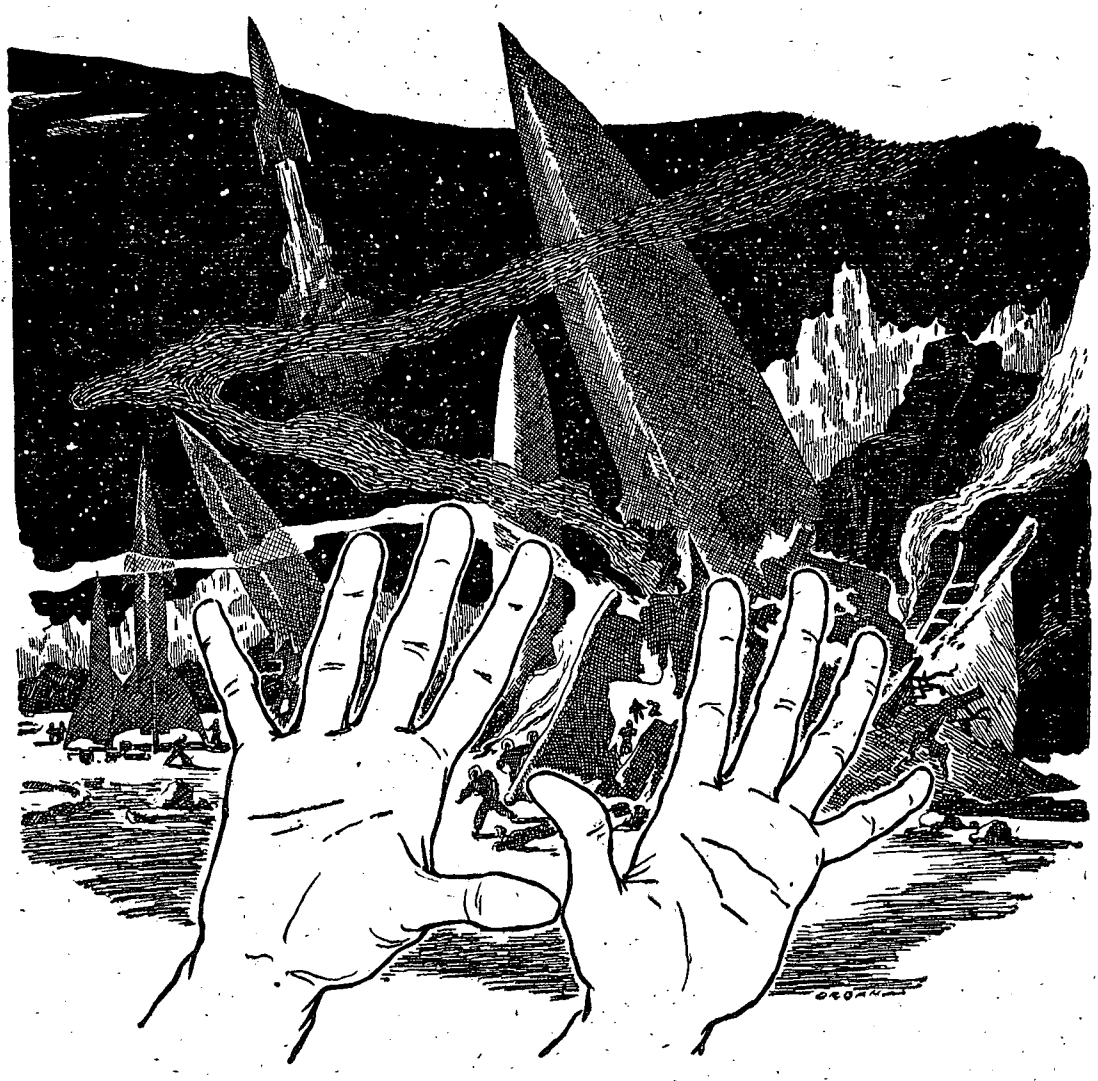

I didn't like it, but his curiosity was so friendly that I couldn't quite resent it.

"Tell me," he said, "what's it like out there?"

The plane was lifting, and I looked out at the Arizona desert sliding by close underneath.

"Different," I said. "It's different."

The answer seemed to satisfy him completely. "I'll just bet it is," he said. "Are you going home, Mr.—"

"Haddon. Sergeant Frank Haddon."

"You going home, Sergeant?"

"My home's back in Ohio," I told him. "I'm going in to L.A. to look up some people before I go home."

"Well, that's fine. I hope you have a good time, Sergeant. You deserve it. You boys did a great job out there. Why, I read in the newspapers that after the U.N. sends out a couple more expeditions, we'll have cities out there, and regular passenger lines, and all that."

"Look," I said, "that stuff is for the birds. You might as well build cities down there in Mojave, and have them a

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lot closer. There's only one reason for going to Mars now, and that's uranium."

I could see he didn't quite believe me. "Oh, sure," he said, "I know that's important too, the uranium we're all using now for our power-stations—but that isn't all, is it?"

"It'll be all, for a long, long time," I said.

"But look, Sergeant, this newspaper article said—"

I didn't say anything more. By the time he'd finished telling about the newspaper article, we were coming down into L.A. He pumped my hand when we got out of the plane.

"Have yourself a time, Sergeant! You sure rate it . . . I hear a lot of chaps on Two didn't come back."

"Yeah," I said. "I heard that."

I WAS feeling shaky again by the time I got to downtown L.A. I went in a bar and had a double bourbon and it made me feel a little better.

I went out and found a cabby and asked him to drive me out to San Gabriel. He was a fat man with a broad red face.

"Hop right in, buddy," he said. "Say, you're one of those Mars guys, aren't you?"

I said, "That's right."

"Well, well," he said. "Tell me, how was it out there?"

"It was a pretty dull grind, in a way," I told him.

"I'll bet it was!" he said, as we started through traffic. "Me, I was in the army in World War Two, twenty years ago. That's just what it was, a dull grind nine-tenths of the time. I guess it hasn't changed any."

"This wasn't any army expedition," I explained. "It was a United Nations one, not an army one—but we had officers and rules of discipline like the army."

"Sure, it's the same thing," said the cabby. "You don't need to tell me what it's like, buddy. Why, back there in '42—or was it '43?—anyway, back there I remember that—"

I leaned back and watched Huntington Boulevard slide past. The sun poured in on me and seemed very hot, and the air seemed very thick and soupy. It hadn't been so bad up on the Arizona plateau, but it was a little hard to breathe down here.

The cabby wanted to know what address in San Gabriel? I got the little packet of letters out of my pocket and found the one that had 'Martin Valinez' and a street address on the back. I told the cabby, and put the letters back into my pocket.

I wished now that I'd never answered them.

But how could I keep from answering when Joe Valinex' parents wrote to me at the hospital? And it was the same with Jim's girl, and Walter's family. I'd had to write back, and the first thing I knew I'd promised to come and see them, and now if I went back to Ohio without doing it I'd feel like a heel. Right now, I wished I'd decided to be a heel.

The address was on the south side of San Gabriel, in a section that still had a faintly Mexican tinge to it. There was a little frame grocery store with a small house beside it, and a picket fence around the yard of the house; very neat, but a queerly homely place after all the slick California stucco.

I went into the little grocery, and a tall, dark man with quiet eyes took a look at me and called a woman's name in a low voice, and then came around the counter and took my hand.

"You're Sergeant Haddon," he said. "Yes. Of course. We've been hoping you'd come."

His wife came in a hurry from the back. She looked a little too old to be Joe's mother, for Joe had been just a kid; but then she didn't look so old either, but just sort of worn.

She said to Valinez, "Please, a chair. Can't you see he's tired. And just from the hospital—"

I sat down and looked between them

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at a case of canned peppers, and they asked me how I felt, and wouldn't I be glad to get home, and they hoped all my family were well.

They were gentlefolk. They hadn't said a word about Joe, just waited for me to say something. And I felt in a spot, for I hadn't known Joe well, not really. He'd been moved into our squad only a couple of weeks before take-off, and since he'd been our first casualty, I'd never got to know him much.

I finally had to get it over with, and all I could think to say was, "They wrote you in detail about Joe, didn't they?"

Valinez nodded gravely. "Yes—that he died from shock within twenty-four hours after take-off. The letter was very nice."

His wife nodded too. "Very nice," she murmured. She looked at me, and I guess she saw that I didn't know quite what to say, for she said, "You can tell us more about it. Yet you must not, if it pains you."

I could tell them more. Oh, yes, I could tell them a lot more, if I wanted to. It was all clear in my mind, like a movie-film you run over and over till you know it by heart.

I could tell them all about the take-off that had killed their son. The long lines of us, uniformed backs going up into Rocket Four and all the other nineteen rockets—the lights flaring up there on the plateau, the grind of machinery and blast of whistles and the inside of the big rocket as we climbed up the ladders of its center-well.

THE movie was running again in my mind, clear as crystal, and I was back in Cell Fourteen of Rocket Four, with the minutes ticking away and the walls quivering every time one of the other rockets blasted off, and us ten men in our hammocks, prisoned inside that odd-shaped windowless metal room, waiting. Waiting, till that big, giant hand came

Inside Hamilton

IN VARIOUS and sundry editorial notations we have before now mentioned the new Ed Hamilton who rose, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of Captain Future, and the mature skill of his current writing.

Pick up any fifteen-year-old stf magazine, and unless you're one of the die-hards who insist that the creaky, ill-written mellerdrammers of that era are just wonderful, you'll suspect that yesterday's science fiction is as dated as silent movies, the Charleston and goldfish swallowing.

It was during that primitive period that "World-Wrecker" Ed Hamilton earned his reputation for more muscular heroes, more voluptuous gals, more spectacular disasters, more menacing villains . . . and because he has always been a good, skilful writer, he rated tops in the space-opera field.

Now science fiction has grown up. And so has Hamilton. He has adjusted his sights to the new goal, as have other seasoned scribes who really had the stuff inside of them and were just waiting around for the right audience. And this story—thoughtful, mature, sensitive, warm with human emotion and touched with acid—is living proof of his growth as a writer. It is little short of a masterpiece. We think it is one of the finest stories we've ever published—by Hamilton or anyone else.

—The Editor

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and smacked us down deep into our recoil-springs, crushing the breath out of us, so that you fought to breathe, and the blood roared into your head, and your stomach heaved in spite of all the pills they'd given you, and you heard the giant laughing, *b-r-room! b-r-r-room! b-r-r-oom!*

Smash, smash, again and again, hitting us in the guts and cutting our breath, and someone being sick, and someone else sobbing, and the *b-r-r-oom! b-r-r-oom!* laughing as it killed us; and then the giant quit laughing, and quit slapping us down, and you could feel your sore and shaky body and wonder if it was still all there.

Walter Millis cursing a blue streak in the hammock underneath me, and Breck Jergen, our sergeant then, clambering painfully out of his straps to look us over, and then through the voices a thin, ragged voice saying uncertainly, "Breck, I think I'm hurt—"

Sure, that was their boy Joe, and there was blood on his lips, and he'd had it—we knew when we first looked at him that he'd had it. A handsome kid, turned waxy now as he held his hand on his middle and looked up at us. Expedition One had proved that take-off would hit a certain percentage with internal injuries every time, and in our squad, in our little windowless cell, it was Joe that had been hit.

If only he'd died right off. But he couldn't die right off, he had to lie in the hammock all those hours and hours. The medics came and put a strait-jacket around his body and doped him up, and that was that, and the hours went by. And we were so shaken and deathly sick ourselves that we didn't have the sympathy for him we should have had—not till he started moaning and begging us to take the jacket off.

Finally Walter Millis wanted to do it, and Breck wouldn't allow it, and they were arguing and we were listening when the moaning stopped, and there was no need to do anything about Joe Valinez any more. Nothing but to call the medics, who came into our little iron prison and took him away.

Sure, I could tell the Valinezes all about how their Joe died, couldn't I?

"Please," whispered Mrs. Valinez, and her husband looked at me and nodded silently.

So I told them.

I said, "You know Joe died in space. He'd been knocked out by the shock of take-off, and he was unconscious, not feeling a thing. And then he woke up, before he died. He didn't seem to be feeling any pain, not a bit. He lay there, looking out the window at the stars. They're beautiful, the stars out there in space, like angels. He looked, and then he whispered something and lay back and was gone."

Mrs. Valinez began to cry softly. "To die out there, looking at stars like angels—"

I got up to go, and she didn't look up. I went out the door of the little grocery store, and Valinez came with me.

He shook my hand. "Thank you, Sergeant Haddon. Thank you very much."

"Sure," I said.

I got into the cab. I took out my letters and tore that one into bits. I wished to God I'd never got it. I wished I didn't have any of the other letters I still had.

II

I TOOK the early plane for Omaha. Before we got there I fell asleep in my seat, and then I began to dream, and that wasn't good.

A voice said, "We're coming down."

And we were coming down, Rocket Four was coming down, and there we were in our squad-cell, all of us strapped into our hammocks, waiting and scared, wishing there was a window so we could see out, hoping our rocket wouldn't be the one to crack up, hoping none of the rockets cracked up, but if one does, don't let it be *ours*. . . .

"We're coming down . . ."

Coming down, with the blasts start-

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ing to boom again underneath us, hitting us hard, not steady like at take-off, but blast-blast-blast, and then again, blast-blast.

Breck's voice, calling to us from across the cell, but I couldn't hear for the roaring that was in my ears between blasts. No, it was *not* in my ears, that roaring came from the wall beside me: we had hit atmosphere, we were coming in.

The blasts in lightning succession without stopping, crash-crash-crash-crash-crash! Mountains fell on me, and this was it, and don't let it be ours, please, God, don't let it be ours . . .

Then the bump and the blackness, and finally somebody yelling hoarsely in my ears, and Breck Jergen, his face deathly white, leaning over me.

"Unstrap and get out, Frank! All men out of hammocks—all men out!"

We'd landed, and we hadn't cracked up, but we were half dead and they wanted us to turn out, right this minute, and we couldn't.

Breck yelling to us, "Breathing-masks on! Masks on! We've got to go out!"

"My God, we've just landed, we're torn to bits, we can't!"

"We've got to! Some of the other rockets cracked up in landing and we've got to save whoever's still living in them! Masks on! Hurry!"

We couldn't, but we did. They hadn't given us all those months of discipline for nothing. Jim Clymer was already on his feet, Walter was trying to unstrap underneath me, whistles were blowing like mad somewhere and voices shouted hoarsely.

My knees wobbled under me as I hit the floor. Young Lassen, beside me, tried to say something and then crumpled up. Jim bent over him, but Breck was at the door yelling, "Let him go! Come on!"

The whistles screeching at us all the way down the ladders of the well, and the mask-clip hurting my nose, and down at the bottom a dishevelled officer yelling at us to get out and join Squad Five, and the gangway reeling under us.

Cold. Freezing cold, and a wan sunshine from the shrunken little sun up there in the brassy sky, and a rolling plain of ocherous red sand stretching around us, sand that slid away under our feet as our squads followed Captain Wall toward the distant metal bulk that lay oddly canted and broken in a little shallow valley.

"Come on, men—hurry! Hurry!"

Sure, all of it a dream, the dreamlike way we walked with our lead-soled shoes dragging our feet back after each step, and the voices coming through the mask-resonators muffled and distant.

Only not a dream, but a nightmare, when we got up to the canted metal bulk and saw what had happened to Rocket Seven—the metal hull ripped like paper, and a few men crawling out of the wreck with blood on them, and a gurgling sound where shattered tanks were emptying, and voices whimpering, "First aid! First aid!"

Only it hadn't happened, it hadn't happened yet at all, for we were still back in Rocket Four coming in, we hadn't landed yet at all but we were going to any minute—

"We're coming down. . . ."

I couldn't go through it all again. I yelled and fought my hammock-straps and woke up, and I was in my plane-seat and a scared hostess was a foot away from me, saying, "This is Omaha, Sergeant! We're coming down."

They were all looking at me, all the other passengers, and I guessed I'd been talking in the dream—I still had the sweat down my back like all those nights in the hospital when I'd keep waking up.

I sat up, and they all looked away from me quick and pretended they hadn't been staring.

WE CAME down to the airport. It was mid-day, and the hot Nebraska sun felt good on my back when I got out. I was lucky, for when I asked at the bus depot about going to Cuffington, there was a bus all ready to roll.

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A farmer sat down beside me, a big, young fellow who offered me cigarettes and told me it was only a few hours' ride to Cuffington.

"Your home there?" he asked.

"No, my home's back in Ohio," I said. "A friend of mine came from there. Name of Clymer."

He didn't know him, but he remembered that one of the town boys had gone on that Second Expedition, to Mars.

"Yeah," I said. "That was Jim."

He couldn't keep it in any longer. "What's it like out there, anyway?"

I said, "Dry. Terrible dry."

"I'll bet it is," he said. "To tell the truth, it's too dry here, this year, for good wheat weather. Last year, it was fine. Last year—"

Cuffington, Nebraska, was a wide street of stores, and other streets with trees and old houses, and yellow wheat-fields all around as far as you could see. It was pretty hot, and I was glad to sit down in the bus-depot while I went through the thin little phone-book.

There were three Graham families in the book, but the first one I called was the right one—Miss Ila Graham. She talked fast and excited, and said she'd come right over, and I said I'd wait in front of the bus-depot.

I stood underneath the awning, looking down the quiet street and thinking that it sort of explained why Jim Clymer had always been such a quiet, slow-moving sort of guy. The place was sort of relaxed, like he'd been.

A coupé pulled up, and Miss Graham opened the door. She was a brown-haired girl, not especially good-looking, but the kind you think of as a nice girl, a very nice girl.

She said, "You look so tired, that I feel guilty now about asking you to stop."

"I'm all right," I said. "And it's no trouble stopping over a couple of places on my way back to Ohio."

As we drove across the little town, I asked her if Jim hadn't had any family of his own here.

"His parents were killed in a car-crash years ago," Miss Graham said. "He lived with an uncle on a farm outside Grandview, but they didn't get along, and Jim came into town and got a job at the power station."

She added, as we turned a corner, "My mother rented him a room. That's how we got to know each other. That's how we—how we got engaged."

"Yeah, sure," I said.

It was a big square house with a deep front porch, and some trees around it. I sat down in a wicker chair, and Miss Graham brought her mother out. Her mother talked a little about Jim, how they missed him, and how she declared he'd been just like a son.

When her mother went back in, Miss Graham showed me a little bunch of blue envelopes. "These were the letters I got from Jim. There weren't very many of them, and they weren't very long."

"We were only allowed to send one thirty-word message every two weeks," I told her. "There were a couple of thousand of us out there, and they couldn't let us jam up the message-transmitter all the time."

"It was wonderful, how much Jim could put into just a few words," she said, and handed me some of them.

I read a couple. One said, "I have to pinch myself to realize that I'm one of the first Earthmen to stand on an alien world. At night, in the cold, I look up at the green star that's Earth and can't quite realize I've helped an age-old dream come true."

Another one said, "This world's grim and lonely, and mysterious. We don't know much about it, yet. So far, nobody's seen anything living but the lichens that Expedition One reported, but there might be anything here."

Miss Graham asked me, "Was that all there was, just lichens?"

"That, and two or three kinds of queer cactus things," I said. "And rock and sand. That's all."

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AS I read more of those little blue letters, I found that now that Jim was gone, I knew him better than I ever had. There was something about him I'd never suspected. He was romantic, inside. We hadn't suspected it, he was always so quiet and slow, but now I saw that all the time he was more romantic about the thing we were doing than any of us.

He hadn't let on. We'd have kidded him, if he had. Our name for Mars, after we got sick of it, was The Hole. We always talked about it as The Hole. I could see now that Jim had been too shy of our kidding to ever let us know that he glamorized the thing in his mind.

"This was the last one I got from him before his sickness," Miss Graham said.

That one said, "I'm starting north tomorrow with one of the mapping expeditions. We'll travel over country no human has ever seen before."

I nodded. "I was on that party, myself. Jim and I were on the same half-trac."

"He was thrilled by it, wasn't he, Sergeant?"

I wondered. I remembered that trip, and it was hell. Our job was simply to run a preliminary topographical survey, checking with Geigers for possible uranium deposits.

It wouldn't have been so bad, if the sand hadn't started to blow.

It wasn't sand like Earth sand. It was ground to dust by billions of years of blowing around that dry world. It got inside your breathing-mask, and your goggles, and the engines of the half-tracs, in your food and water and clothes. There was nothing for three days but cold, and wind, and sand.

Thrilled? I'd have laughed at that, before. But now, I didn't know. Maybe Jim had been, at that. He had lots of patience, a lot more than I ever had. Maybe he glamorized that hellish trip into wonderful adventure on a foreign world.

"Sure, he was thrilled," I said. "We all were. Anybody would be."

Miss Graham took the letters back, and then said, "You had Martian sickness too, didn't you?"

I said, Yes, I had, just a touch, and that was why I'd had to spend a stretch in Reconditioning Hospital when I got back.

She waited for me to go on, and I knew I had to. "They don't know yet if it's some sort of virus, or just the effect of Martian conditions on Earthmen's bodies. It hit forty percent of us. It wasn't really so bad—fever and dopiness, mostly."

"When Jim got it, was he well cared for?" she asked. Her lips were quivering a little.

"Sure, he was well cared for. He got the best care there was," I lied.

THE best care there was? That was a laugh. The first cases got decent care, maybe. But they'd never figured on so many coming down. There wasn't any room in our little hospital—they just had to stay in their bunks in the aluminum Quonsets when it hit them. All our doctors but one were down, and two of them died.

We'd been on Mars six months when it hit us, and the loneliness had already got us down. All but four of our rockets had gone back to Earth, and we were alone on a dead world, our little town of Quonsets huddled together under that hateful, brassy sky, and beyond it the sand and rocks that went on forever.

You go up to the North Pole and camp there, and find out how lonely that is. It was worse, out there, a lot worse. The first excitement was gone long ago, and we were tired, and homesick in a way nobody was ever homesick before—we wanted to see green grass, and real sunshine, and women's faces, and hear running water; and we wouldn't until Expedition Three came to relieve us. No wonder guys blew their tops, out there. And then came Martian sickness, on top of it.

"We did everything for him that we could," I said.

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SURE we had. I could still remember Walter and me tramping through the cold night to the hospital to try to get a medic, while Breck stayed with him, and how we couldn't get one.

I remember how Walter had looked up at the blazing sky as we tramped back, and shaken his fist at the big green star of Earth.

"People up there are going to dances tonight, watching shows, sitting around in warm rooms laughing! Why should good men have to die out here to get them uranium for cheap power?"

"Can it," I told him tiredly. "Jim's not going to die. A lot of guys got over it."

The best care there was? That was real funny. All we could do was wash his face, and give him the pills the medic left, and watch him get weaker every day till he died.

"Nobody could have done more for him than was done," I told Miss Graham.

"I'm glad," she said. "I guess—it's just one of those things."

When I got up to go she asked me if I didn't want to see Jim's room. They'd kept it for him just the same, she said.

I didn't want to, but how are you going to say so? I went up with her and looked and said it was nice. She opened a big cupboard. It was full of neat rows of old magazines.

"They're all the old science-fiction magazines he read when he was a boy," she said. "He always saved them."

I took one out. It had a bright cover, with a space-ship on it, not like our rockets but a streamlined thing, and the rings of Saturn in the background.

When I laid it down, Miss Graham took it up and put it back carefully into its place in the row, as though somebody was coming back who wouldn't like to find things out of order.

She insisted on driving me back to Omaha, and out to the airport. She seemed sorry to let me go, and I suppose it was because I was the last real tie to Jim, and when I was gone it was all over then for good.

I wondered if she'd get over it in time, and I guessed she would. People do get over things. I supposed she'd marry some other nice guy, and I wondered what they'd do with Jim's things—with all those old magazines nobody was ever coming back to read.

III

I WOULD never have stopped at Chicago at all if I could have got out of it, for the last person I wanted to talk to anybody about was Walter Millis. It would be too easy for me to make a slip, and let out stuff nobody was supposed to know.

But Walter's father had called me at the hospital, a couple of times. The last time he called, he said he was having Breck's parents come down from Wisconsin so they could see me too, so what could I do then but say, Yes, I'd stop. But I didn't like it at all, and I knew I'd have to be careful.

Mr. Millis was waiting at the airport and shook hands with me and said what a big favor I was doing them all, and how he appreciated my stopping when I must be anxious to get back to my own home and parents.

"That's all right," I said. "My dad and mother came out to the hospital to see me when I first got back."

He was a big, fine-looking important sort of man, with a little bit of the stuffed shirt about him, I thought. He seemed friendly enough, but I got the feeling he was looking at me and wondering why I'd come back and his son Walter hadn't. Well, I couldn't blame him for that.

His car was waiting, a big car with a driver, and we started north through the city. Mr. Millis pointed out a few things to me to make conversation, especially a big atomic power station we passed.

"It's only one of thousands, strung all over the world," he said. "They're going to transform our whole economy. This Martian uranium will be a big thing, Sergeant."

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I said, Yes, I guessed it would.

I was sweating blood, waiting for him to start asking about Walter, and I didn't know yet just what I could tell him. I could get myself in dutch plenty if I opened my big mouth too wide, for that one thing that had happened to Expedition Two was supposed to be strictly secret, and we'd all been briefed on why we had to keep our mouths shut.

But he let it go for the time being, and just talked other stuff. I gathered that his wife wasn't too well, and that Walter had been their only child. I also gathered that he was a very big shot in business, and dough-heavy.

I didn't like him. Walter, I'd liked plenty, but his old man seemed a pretty pompous person, with his heavy business talk.

He wanted to know how soon I thought Martian uranium would come through in quantity, and I said I didn't think it'd be very soon.

"Expedition One only located the deposits." I said, "and Two just did mapping and setting up a preliminary base. Of course, the thing keeps expanding, and I hear Four will have a hundred rockets. But Mars is a tough set-up."

Mr. Millis said decisively that I was wrong, that the world was power-hungry, that it would be pushed a lot faster than I expected.

He suddenly quit talking business and looked at me and asked, "Who was Walter's best friend, out there?"

He asked it sort of apologetically. He was a stuffed-shirt; but all my dislike of him went away, then.

"Breck Jergen," I told him. "Breck was our sergeant . . . he sort of held our squad together, and he and Walter cottoned to each other from the first."

Mr. Millis nodded, but didn't say anything more about it. He pointed out the window at the distant lake, and said we were almost to his home.

It wasn't a home, it was a big mansion. We went in and he introduced me to Mrs. Millis. She was a limp, pale-looking woman, who said she was glad to meet one of Walter's friends. Somehow I got the feeling that even though he was a stuffed shirt, he felt it about Walter a lot more than she did.

He took me up to a bedroom and said that Breck's parents would arrive before dinner, and that I could get a little rest before then.

I SAT looking around the room. It was the plushiest one I'd ever been in, and seeing this house and the way these people lived, I began to understand why Walter had blown his top more than the rest of us.

He'd been a good guy, Walter, but high-tempered, and I could see now he'd been a little spoiled. The discipline at Training Base had been tougher on him than on most of us, and this was why.

I sat and dreaded this dinner that was coming up, and looked out the window at a swimming-pool and tennis court, and wondered if anybody ever used them now that Walter was gone. It seemed a queer thing for a fellow with a set-up like this to go out to Mars and get himself killed.

I took the satin cover off the bed so my shoes wouldn't dirty it, and lay down and closed my eyes, and wondered what I was going to tell them. The trouble was, I didn't know what story the officials had given them.

"The Commanding Officer regrets to inform you that your son was shot down like a dog—"

They'd never got any telegram like that. But just what line *had* been handed them? I wished I'd had a chance to check on that.

Damn it, why didn't all these people let me alone? They started it all going through my mind again, and the psychos had told me I ought to forget it for a while, but how could I?

It might be better just to tell them the truth. After all, Walter wasn't the only one who'd blown his top out there. In that grim last couple of months, plenty of guys had gone around sounding off.

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Expedition Three isn't coming!

We're stuck, and they don't care enough about us to send help!

That was the line of talk. You heard it plenty, in those days. You couldn't blame the guys for it, either. A fourth of us down with Martian sickness, the little grave-markers clotting up the valley beyond the ridge, rations getting thin, medicine running low, everything running low, all of us watching the sky for rockets that never came.

There'd been a little hitch back on Earth, Colonel Nichols explained. (He was our CO now that General Rayen had died.) There was a little delay, but the rockets would be on their way soon, we'd get relief, we just had to hold on—

Holding on—that's what we were doing. Nights we'd sit in the Quonset, and listen to Lassen coughing in his bunk, and it seemed like wind-giants, cold-giants, were bawling and laughing around our little huddle of shelters.

"Damn it, if they're not coming, why don't we go home?" Walter said. "We've still got the four rockets—they could take us all back."

Breck's serious face got graver. "Look, Walter, there's too much of that stuff being talked around. Lay off."

"Can you blame the men for talking it? We're not story-book heroes. If they've forgotten about us back on Earth, why do we just sit and take it?"

"We have to," Breck said. "Three will come."

I've always thought that it wouldn't have happened, what did happen, if we hadn't had that false alarm. The one that set the whole camp wild that night, with guys shouting, "Three's here! The rockets landed over west of Rock Ridge!"

Only when they charged out there, they found they hadn't seen rockets landing at all, but a little shower of tiny meteors burning themselves up as they fell.

IT WAS the disappointment that did it, I think. I can't say for sure, because that same day was the day I conked out with Martian sickness, and the floor came up and hit me and I woke up in the bunk, with somebody giving me a hypo, and my head big as a balloon.

I wasn't clear out, it was only a touch of it, but it was enough to make everything foggy, and I didn't know about the mutiny that was boiling up until I woke up once with Breck leaning over me, and saw he wore a gun and an MP brassard now.

When I asked him how come, he said there'd been so much wild talk about grabbing the four rockets and going home, that the MP force had been doubled, and Nichols had issued stern warnings.

"Walter?" I said, and Breck nodded. "He's a leader and he'll get hit with a court-martial when this is over. The blasted idiot!"

"I don't get it—he's got plenty of guts, you know that," I said.

"Yes, but he can't take discipline, he never did take it very well, and now that the squeeze is on he's blowing up. Well, see you later, Frank."

I saw him later, but not the way I expected. For that was the day we heard the faint echo of shots, and then the alarm-siren screaming, and men running, and half-tracs starting up in a hurry. And when I managed to get out of my bunk and out of the hut, they were all going toward the big rockets, and a corporal yelled to me from a jeep, "That's blown it! The damn fools swiped guns and tried to take over the rockets and make the crews fly 'em home!"

I could still remember the sickening slidings and bouncings of the jeep as it took us out there, the milling little crowd under the looming rockets, milling around and hiding something on the ground, and Major Weiler yelling himself hoarse giving orders.

When I got to see what was on the ground, it was seven or eight men and most of them dead. Walter had been shot right through the heart. They told

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me later it was because he'd been the leader, out in front, that he got it first of the mutineers.

One MP was dead, and one was sitting with red all over the middle of his uniform, and that one was Breck, and they were bringing a stretcher for him now.

The corporal said, "Hey, that's Jergen, your squad-leader!"

And I said, "Yes, that's him." Funny, how you can't talk when something hits you—how you just say words, like "Yes, that's him."

Breck died that night without ever regaining consciousness, and there I was, still half-sick myself, and with Lassen dying in his bunk, and five of us were all that was left of Squad Fourteen, and that was that.

How could HQ let a thing like that get known? A fine advertisement it would be for recruiting more Mars expeditions, if they told how guys on Two cracked up and did a crazy thing like that. I didn't blame them for telling us to keep it top secret. Anyway, it wasn't something we'd want to talk about.

But it sure left me in a fine spot now, a sweet spot. I was going down to talk to Breck's parents and Walter's parents, and they'd want to know how their sons died, and I could tell them, "Your sons probably killed each other, out there."

Sure, I could tell them that, couldn't I? But what *was* I going to tell them? I knew HQ had reported those casualties as "accidental deaths," but what kind of accident?

Well, it got late, and I had to go down, and when I did, Breck's parents were there. Mr. Jergen was a carpenter, a tall, bony man with level blue eyes like Breck's. He didn't say much, but his wife was a little woman who talked enough for both of them.

She told me I looked just like I did in the pictures of us Breck had sent home from Training Base. She said she had three daughters too— two of them married, and one of the married ones living in Milwaukee and one out on the Coast.

She said that she'd named Breck after a character in a book by Robert Louis Stevenson, and I said I'd read the book in high school.

"It's a nice name," I said.

She looked at me with bright eyes and said, "Yes. It was a nice name."

That was a fine dinner. They'd got everything they thought I might like, and all the best, and a maid served it, and I couldn't taste a thing. I ate.

Then afterward, in the big living-room, they all just sort of sat and waited, and I knew it was up to me.

I asked them if they'd had any details about the accident, and Mr. Millis said, No, just "accidental death" was all they'd been told.

Well, that made it easier. I sat there, with all four of them watching my face, and dreamed it up.

I SAID, "It was one of those one-in-a-million things. You see, more little meteorites hit the ground on Mars than here, because the air's so much thinner it doesn't burn them up so fast. And one hit the edge of the fuel-dump and a bunch of little tanks started to blow. I was down with the sickness, so I didn't see it, but I heard all about it."

You could hear everybody breathing, it was so quiet as I went on with my yarn.

"A couple of guys were knocked out by the concussion, and would have been burned up if a few fellows hadn't got in there fast with foamite extinguishers. They kept it away from the big tanks, but another little tank let go, and Breck and Walter were two of the fellows who'd gone in, and they were killed instantly."

When I'd got it told, it sounded corny to me and I was afraid they'd never believe it. But nobody said anything, until Mr. Millis let out a sigh and said, "So that was it. Well—well, if it had to be, it was mercifully quick, wasn't it?"

I said, Yes, it was quick.

"Only, I can't see why they couldn't have let us know. It doesn't seem fair—"

I had an answer for that. "It's hush-

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hush because they don't want people to know about the meteor danger. That's why."

Mrs. Millis got up and said she wasn't feeling so well, and would I excuse her and she'd see me in the morning. The rest of us didn't seem to have much to say to each other, and nobody objected when I went up to my bedroom a little later.

I was getting ready to turn in when there was a knock on the door. It was Breck's father, and he came in and looked at me, steadily.

"It was just a story, wasn't it?" he said.

I said, "Yes. It was just a story."

His eyes bored into me and he said, "I guess you've got your reasons. Just tell me one thing. Whatever it was, did Breck behave right?"

"He behaved like a man, all the way," I said. "He was the best man of us, first to last."

He looked at me, and I guess something made him believe me. He shook hands and said, "All right, son. We'll let it go."

I'd had enough. I wasn't going to face them again in the morning. I wrote a note, thanking them all and making excuses, and then went down and slipped quietly out of the house.

It was late, but a truck coming along picked me up, and the driver said he was going near the airport. He asked me what it was like on Mars and I told him it was lonesome. I slept in a chair at the airport, and I felt better, for next day I'd be home, and it would be over.

That's what I thought.

IV

IT WAS getting toward evening when we reached the village, for my father and mother hadn't known I was coming on an earlier plane, and I'd had to wait for them up at Cleveland airport. When we drove into Market Street, I saw there was a big painted banner stretching across:

"HARMONVILLE WELCOMES HOME ITS SPACEMAN!"

Spaceman—that was me. The newspapers had started calling us that, I guess, because it was a short word good for headlines. Everybody called us that now. We'd sat cooped up in a prison-cell that flew, that was all—but now we were "spacemen."

There were bright uniforms clustered under the banner, and I saw that it was the high school band. I didn't say anything, but my father saw my face.

"Now, Frank, I know you're tired, but these people are your friends and they want to show you a real welcome."

That was fine. Only it was all gone again, the relaxed feeling I'd been beginning to get as we drove down from Cleveland.

This was my home-country, this old Ohio country with its neat little white villages and fat, rolling farms. It looked good, in June. It looked very good, and I'd been feeling better all the time. And now I didn't feel so good, for I saw that I was going to have to talk some more about Mars.

Dad stopped the car under the banner, and the high school band started to play, and Mr. Robinson, who was the Chevrolet dealer and also the mayor of Harmonville, got into the car with us.

He shook hands with me and said, "Welcome home, Frank! What was it like out on Mars?"

I said, "It was cold, Mr. Robinson. Awful cold."

"You should have been here last February!" he said. "Eighteen below—nearly a record."

He leaned out and gave a signal, and dad started driving again, with the band marching along in front of us and playing. We didn't have far to go, just down Market Street under the big old maples, past the churches and the old white houses to the square white Grange Hall.

There was a little crowd in front of it, and they made a sound like a cheer—not a real loud one, you know how people can be self-conscious about really

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cheering—when we drove up. I got out and shook hands with people I didn't really see, and then Mr. Robinson took my elbow and took me on inside.

The seats were all filled and people standing up, and over the little stage at the far end they'd fixed up a big floral decoration—there was a globe all of red roses with a sign above it that said "Mars," and beside it a globe all of white roses that said "Earth," and a little rocket-ship made out of flowers was hung between them.

"The Garden Club fixed it up," said Mr. Robinson. "Nearly everybody in Harmonville contributed flowers."

"It sure is pretty," I said.

Mr. Robinson took me by the arm, up onto the little stage, and everyone clapped. They were all people I knew—people from the farms near ours, my high school teachers, and all that.

I sat down in a chair and Mr. Robinson made a little speech, about how Harmonville boys had always gone out when anything big was doing, how they'd gone to the War of 1812 and the Civil War and the two World Wars, and how now one of them had gone to Mars.

He said, "Folks have always wondered what it's like out there on Mars, and now here's one of our own Harmonville boys come back to tell us all about it."

And he motioned me to get up, and I did, and they clapped some more, and I stood wondering what I could tell them.

And all of a sudden, as I stood there wondering, I got the answer to something that had always puzzled us out there. We'd never been able to understand why the fellows who had come back from Expedition One hadn't tipped us off how tough it was going to be. And now I knew why. They hadn't, because it would have sounded as if they were whining about all they'd been through. And now I couldn't, for the same reason.

I looked down at the bright, interested faces, the faces I'd known almost all my life, and I knew that what I could tell them was no good anyway. For they'd all read those newspaper stories, about "the exotic red planet" and "heroic spacemen," and if anyone tried to give them a different picture now, it would just upset them.

I SAID, "It was a long way out there. But flying space is a wonderful thing—flying right off the Earth, into the stars—there's nothing quite like it."

Flying space. I called it. It sounded good, and thrilling. How could they know that flying space meant lying strapped in that blind stokehold, listening to Joe Valinez dying, and praying and praying that it wouldn't be our rocket that cracked up?

"And it's a wonderful thrill to come out of a rocket and step on a brand-new world, to look up at a different-looking Sun, to look around at a whole new horizon—"

Yes, it was wonderful. Especially for the guys in Rockets Seven and Nine who got squashed like flies and lay around there on the sand, moaning "First aid!" Sure, it was a big thrill, for them and for us who had to try to help them.

"There were hardships out there, but we all knew that a big job had to be done—"

That's a nice word too, "hardships." It's not coarse and ugly like fellows coughing their hearts out from too much dust; it's not like having your best friend die of Martian sickness right in the room you sleep in. It's a nice, cheerful word, "hardships."

"—and the only way we could get the job done, away out there so far from Earth, was by team-work."

Well, that was true enough in its way, and what was the use of spoiling it by telling them how Walter and Breck had died?

"The job's going on, and Expedition Three is building a bigger base out there right now, and Four will start soon. And it'll mean plenty of uranium, plenty of cheap atomic power, for all Earth."

That's what I said, and I stopped there. But I wanted to go on and add,

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"And it wasn't worth it! It wasn't worth all those guys, all the hell we went through, just to get cheap atomic power so you people can run more electric washers and television sets and toasters!"

But how are you going to stand up and say things like that to people you know, people who like you? And who was I to decide? Maybe I was wrong, anyway. Maybe lots of things I'd had and never thought about had been squeezed out of other good guys, back in the past.

I wouldn't know.

Anyway, that was all I could tell them, and I sat down, and there was a big lot of applause, and I realized then that I'd done right, I'd told them just what they wanted to hear, and everyone was all happy about it.

Then things broke up, and people came up to me, and I shook a lot more hands. And finally, when I got outside, it was dark—soft, summery dark, the way I hadn't seen it for a long time. And my father said we ought to be getting on home, so I could rest.

I told him, "You folks drive on ahead, and I'll walk. I'll take the short cut. I'd sort of like to walk through town."

Our farm was only a couple of miles out of the village, and the shortcut across Heller's farm I'd always taken when I was a kid was only a mile. Dad didn't think maybe I ought to walk so far, but I guess he saw I wanted to, so they went on ahead.

I WALKED on down Market Street, and around the little square, and the maples and elms were dark over my head, and the flowers on the lawns smelled the way they used to, but it wasn't the same either—I'd thought it would be, but it wasn't.

When I cut off past the Odd Fellows' Hall, beyond it I met Hobe Evans, the garage-hand at the Ford place, who was humming along half-tight, the same as always on a Saturday night.

"Hello, Frank, heard you were back," he said. I waited for him to ask the question they all asked, but he didn't. He said:

"Boy, you don't look so good! Want a drink?"

He brought out a bottle, and I had one out of it, and he had one, and he said he'd see me around, and went humming on his way. He was feeling too good to care much where I'd been.

I went on, in the dark, across Heller's pasture and then along the creek under the big old willows. I stopped there like I'd always stopped when I was a kid, to hear the frog-noises, and there they were, and all the June-noises, the night-noises, and the night-smells.

I did something I hadn't done for a long time. I looked up at the starry sky, and there it was, the same little red dot I'd peered at when I was a kid and read those old stories, the same red dot that Breck and Jim and Walter and I had stared away at on nights at Training Base, wondering if we'd ever really get there.

WELL, they'd got there, and weren't ever going to leave it now, and there'd be others to stay with them, more and more of them as time went by.

But it was the ones I knew that made the difference, as I looked up at the red dot.

I wished I could explain to them somehow why I hadn't told the truth, not the whole truth. I tried, sort of, to explain.

"I didn't want to lie," I said. "But I had to—at least, it seemed like I had to—"

I quit it. It was crazy, talking to guys who were dead and forty million miles away. They were dead, and it was over, and that was that. I quit looking up at the red dot in the sky, and started on home again.

But I felt as though something was over for me, too. It was being young. I didn't feel old. But I didn't feel young, either, and I didn't think I ever would, not ever again.

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The Sign of HOMO SAP

By DAVE DRYFOOS

AYN had been scouting. He returned all excited.

"This Y-shaped valley," he said, "ends down below, very abruptly. There's a wall that looks artificial at the most southerly point of the west end. There are two animals poking around, wearing what looks like protective armor. And—listen!—they speak the language of Those-Who-Taught!"

Zymn was incredulous. "Aah, you've been hearing things!" he snorted. "Drunk, no doubt, on the high oxygen concentration of this atmosphere! Natural enough, but no reason for you to side with Orje, here."

I'd been claiming that the Y-shaped valley was artificially floored with salt. Zymn wouldn't believe it—he never believes anything I say. Maybe that's one difference between a practical pilot like me and a theoretical scientist like Zymn. Anyhow, our divided command accentuated differences: as pilot, I commanded during flight; but as scientist, Zymn was in charge on the ground. And he wanted us to know it.

So I said nothing, and because I didn't he ordered me to go with him and inspect these beings. Since there were only two, it seemed safe enough for just the pair of us to go, and anyway Zymn was contemptuous of safety precautions.

"You and your deserts!" he jeered as we marched west between rocky canyon walls. "Always you have to pick a spot that looks red from Space! The green areas undoubtedly contain more animal life . . ."

"Sure," I agreed. "More life-forms—and more hostile life-forms. We're seeking a homeland, not a fight."

But, along with routine collecting, we fought all the way.

We fought because Zymn had already determined that this, the third planet from Star XM-523, should be our new home. He had no use for my precautionary objections.

"Investigate!" he mocked. "What is there to investigate? The temperature's all right, the atmosphere is okay, the gravitation is something our people can get used to. And our planet is cooling fast. Already we've wasted too much time searching out a substitute. This is

They Laughed in the Face of Death—and Death Listened. . . .

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it. All we have to do is kill off the vegetation, and maybe increase the rate of oxidation of these rocks. That'll lower the atmosphere's oxygen content to where even an infant can stand it."

"We know nothing about the place," I pointed out, "excepting the few lifeforms we've gathered."

"And aren't they commonplace?" he scoffed. "We know from both experience and theory that the Universe is not chaotic. Both living and non-living forms repeat universally with variations that are basically minor. Nothing here will be totally strange to us—and nothing here is worth bothering about."

"Maybe," I said. "But if you believed all that, you wouldn't be on this hike."

"This hike has another purpose altogether," he answered. "We've got to take into account the fears of the religious. Naturally we can't let ourselves be accused of disturbing Those-Who-Taught, so you and I will personally discredit Ayn's rumor. And when that's done, Orje, we're going to irradiate this atmosphere without any more delay!"

EVEN when we reached the wall near the valley's end, Zymn continued his perverseness. "What if it *is* symmetrical?" he argued when I'd pointed out how it differed in this respect from anything else in sight. "The Universe is symmetrical too—and what lifeform created that?"

But he was talking in the teeth of facts. The wall was a semicircular monolith that filled the narrow canyon from side to side at a uniform height. Behind it was the Y-shaped valley we'd come down, its floor almost level with the top of the wall. But the wall's other face, cracked, concave, and nearly free of vegetation, dropped sheer to the strewn canyon floor a full ship's-length below.

And down there were the beings that spoke.

Two wore armor. The third wore fur. All had four limbs, but the armored ones used just two for walking, though the furry one ran around on all fours, shouting. His language we couldn't understand; the others, we couldn't hear.

So we levitated down the wall and stood beside them.

They were busy and didn't see us at first. The four-legged furry one did, though. He showed his teeth, made his fur stand on end, and backed off with a rumbling sound.

One of the others said, with a strange accent, but in the language of Those-Who-Taught, "What's the matter with the dog?" This one had a high voice.

The low-voiced one looked up, then, and saw us. Its jaw dropped. Its blue eyes, two in number, seemed to reach out on stalks and snap back again, though Zymn has argued about this. It moved backward a step and, having but the two walking-limbs, tripped and fell. The other one looked up and screeched.

"Why do you use the language of Those-Who-Taught?" Zymn demanded.

I hoped they would be careful how they answered; Zymn doesn't like being proved wrong.

But there was no response at all, though the screeching stopped.

So I tried. "We won't hurt you," I said. "We have the highest respect for Those-Who-Taught. It's our religion."

"I think they're trying to talk to us," the deep-voiced one said. It was long and lean, with gray fuzz on top. It got up and went to the other, which shook. They crouched together on a rock, each staring from us to the other as if doubting its senses.

"That's—that's Old English," the shaking one said. "If they speak more slowly, maybe—"

The accent was thick, but I got the idea. So did Zymn.

"See!" he said, fingering his projector. "They don't talk right. They're phonies. So let's wind this up."

"Don't be silly!" I said. "Do you want us to be hanged by the priests? We need *proof* to silence Ayn. Besides, they may know the Sign."

"All right, ask them," Zymn said. "But make it snappy. And the whole

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job is yours—I won't have anything to do with them."

That's how it started. It took a few minutes to get the interview under way; I found out later they were manifesting fear. So was the furry animal—a dog, they called it—and they tied him up to the vegetation with a strap that ran to a collar around his neck.

THEY were, they said, a man and wife. Professor Henry Daugherty and wife Jane. He looked nothing at all like a man. Their sexes you can see from my pronouns.

Henry said he was a historian. His wife was supposed to be a specialist in English, the language of Those-Who-Taught. You'd never have believed her, though, if you'd heard that accent. I'm not going to try to reproduce it, but they were barely intelligible to us, and for that matter we were not easy for them to understand.

They were full of questions, but because they seemed so phony Zymn refused to let me answer.

"They're probably subversive," he said in our own tongue, "else they wouldn't have tried to learn the language. So ask much and tell nothing. And don't pander to that childish curiosity of yours. Just satisfy yourself that they're not brethren of Those-Who-Taught, so we can get on with our work."

I turned to them and said, "Do you know of Those-Who-Taught?" They didn't.

"What do you call yourselves? What species, I mean?"

"Men," said Henry.

Zymn sneered. "See," he said to me. "Mockery!"

To Henry, who still crouched with his arm around his wife, I said, "Better not try to kid us; my friend here will destroy you. We know *you're* not men, because *we* are."

Jane flashed her teeth, but Henry made her stop. "Dignity, dignity," he said. He told us, in perfect seriousness, that many groups call themselves, in their various languages, the equivalent of men. As an historian he knew all about it, he said; lots of groups of primitive inhabitants of his planet had called their own members "men" or "the people" and called all strangers—even of the same species—something else.

"So we're just stumbling over words," he said. "To say you are 'men' is something like saying 'we are us'—meaningless, under the circumstances. But tell us this: who are Those-Who-Taught, whose language we are apparently using?"

"Don't answer them," said Zymn. "It's sacred knowledge, and if they were what Ayn thinks, they'd *know*."

So I gave no details, and merely said that some beings had come to our planet from another, which was too far away for their return, and had stayed among us and taught us technology, including the fundamentals of space-flight.

"All Space-men of our people use this sacred language," I said. "It's important to our training, since the books of Those-Who-Taught are written in the sacred tongue."

Jane said, "The language you use was current here maybe a thousand years ago. Could Those-Who-Taught have lived then?"

That put me on their side, because it fitted the facts.

But Zymn said, "Don't tell them—they're only grasping at straws."

Jane didn't understand him, of course. But she soon realized her question wasn't being answered.

"It's not important, anyhow," she said, with more impudence than I'd have expected. "The main thing is, what did they look like?"

"We don't know," I admitted. "The pictures are sacred, and only the priests see them."

"Then how do we prove who we are?" Jane asked.

"You give the secret Sign," I said.

"And suppose we don't?" Henry asked.

I explained how we would remove the

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oxygen-producing vegetation from the planet, oxidize enough of the surface to reduce the atmospheric oxygen content, and then bring our own people and life-forms there. I also explained why.

And when I finished, the two of them huddled in a silence so chill you'd have thought their planet was afflicted as was our own.

ZYMN distrusted that silence. "Tell them to give the Sign," he ordered. So I did.

"What kind of Sign is it?" Henry asked.

"I'm not permitted to describe it in words," I said. "And I can't imitate it. That's the point—there's something Those-Who-Taught could do that's completely distinctive, utterly unlike the activities of any other form of life known to us. And we know a lot of life-forms."

Henry made motions as if to get to his walking-limbs.

"Stay where you are," I said hastily. "And if you have weapons, don't use them. There are more of us up the valley and you'd only make things worse."

He put a limb around Jane, again.

"By the way," I said, seeking to change the subject, "is the valley by any chance artificial?"

"Quite," said Henry. "Accidental, really. I've been doing research on it; in fact, that's why I'm here in this wilderness. That is Mead Valley, and once it was a lake. This," he said, indicating the wall behind him, "is a dam, built to hold back water so the desert could grow things. It worked, but the water contained silt and the lake filled, eventually."

"But your people made the dam?"

"Quite. Long ago. Doesn't that in itself tell you we're the technologists who taught your people?"

"No," Zymn interrupted, speaking directly to them in his irritation. "The Sign is not a thing of reason."

"Oh, our forebears weren't reasonable," Henry assured him. "That's why I had to come out here and do research. On old maps this structure was known both as Hoover Dam and as Boulder Dam. So I came expecting to find two dams, naturally; but there's only one.

"So here's a tremendous technological feat, accomplished, no doubt, by co-operation among many people. Yet though they could have erected this monolith only with the most intricate teamwork, they apparently could never agree on its name. Is that logical?"

"Neither logical nor relevant," Zymn said brusquely. "It isn't the Sign. It proves nothing!"

Jane broke in, then. Remembering Zymn's hint that the Sign was not an act of logic, she began to demonstrate the non-logical activities of her life-form. She gave us a song, but Zymn opined that the local flying-creatures—birds she called them—sang better. Anyhow, singing was obviously not exclusively an activity of her kind.

And the same with what Henry called art. He bragged of feats of pleasing design, and pointed to the dam itself as proof, but I myself could describe something better, seen only that day. They called what I'd seen a spider-web.

And so it went. Because the two had never been off their planet, we confined our comparisons to things at hand. And we covered many fields of knowledge and activity, both non-logical and logical, as if Henry felt our definition of logic might not be his.

IGNORANT though we were of just those life-forms most familiar to Henry and Jane, we showed them our morning's specimens. They called these ants, bees, swallows—all forms of bird, I think—and were able to prove by the activities of these things that neither social organization, nor engineering, nor architecture were exclusively what Henry insisted on calling "human" specialties. But "human" is a word that distinguishes between us and them, and is therefore foreign to the sacred language.

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And as far as the language itself went, Zymn was prompt to point out that it wasn't native to us, and for all we knew might not be native to them, either. And if it weren't, well, they'd better come up with the Sign—quickly.

So Henry tried to explain about history, which was his specialty. "None of these life-forms you've mentioned can write," he said. "History, though, is the study of written records. And you've said that Those-Who-Taught made such records. Surely that proves our relationship."

Zymn was too impatient to answer. Instead, he leveled his projector and idly shot the vegetation the dog was tied to. His target disappeared. The dog was free. It walked stiffly toward us.

"Call him," said Henry to Jane, speaking very quickly. "Suppose he bites?"

"Here Horace, here Horace, here Horace," Jane said, and made a bird-note.

The dog skirted around me, avoided Zymn as if equipped to read minds, and approached Jane. But on the way he stopped by a bit of vegetation and lifted his leg.

"What's he doing?" I asked, merely to ease the tension.

"Leaving his scent," Henry explained.

"Another animal coming by could know he'd been here?" Zymn asked.

"Yes."

"Then he, too, can write history!"

Jane suddenly doubled up and put an extremity over her mouth as if in pain. She seemed to have a breathing difficulty. Henry shook her violently.

"You'll insult them!" he said.

"I—I just can't help it," she said. "Imagine devoting s-so many years to history and finding out you're no better than a dog. You used to claim it was a dog's life, but I never— Oh, this just tickles me—" And out of her mouth came the rippling sound.

Zymn walked over and put a tentacle on her. "What are you doing?" he demanded.

"She'll stop, she'll stop," Henry said, and pried at the tentacle.

With one sweep, Zymn tumbled him into the dust.

"What are you doing?" he again demanded of Jane.

"Laughing," she said, and her voice broke as she said it. Moisture rolled from her eyes. "I'm laughing, but please don't take offense. It's just the way of some humans when under a strain."

"So?" said Zymn. "And you?" he asked Henry. "Are you laughing, to?"

"All right," said Henry, "yes, if you want to play tough. Yes, I'm laughing too!" And out came the sound, forced, strained, but genuine enough to be recognized.

I looked at Zymn and he looked at me and said, "Okay, Orje. You win this time—you and Ayn. But if it weren't for you two fools, I'd have a home for our people!"

He started to levitate up the dam.

"Wait!" said Henry. "Where are you going?"

"Away," said Zymn. But then, realizing the need, he came back and spoke more respectfully. "We can't destroy the brethren of Those-Who-Taught. We owe too much to your kind."

"And—" Henry insisted.

"And you've given the Sign. The Universe is full of lifeforms that sing, and build, and record their presence variously. Each thinks itself important on that account, and all are wrong.

"But you, my friend, are truly unique. Not because of the skill that built this dam. Not because of the stupid difficulty that developed over its name, either. All those things are really commonplace.

"But you are the *only* animals that laugh!"

Novels by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP and KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN Next Issue!

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Canterbury April

a novel by

RAYMOND F. JONES

Roaring a curse, Black William

I

EVEN the steel felt different in those last days. It had the feel of metal meant for bomb casings. And the glass felt like the substance of tubes built into proximity warheads.

From the window of his office, Chief Research Engineer Joe Cameron watched the assembly floor. Out there, the flow of these materials culminated in immense stacks at the distant shipping platform. Crated in new-smelling lumber, the machines were being loaded for movement to the far corners of the country.

These machines and materials ought to belong to the forces of war, straining to the farthest reaches of the Solar System, but the Government's allotment program would not shut down this torrential flow for another month, and while it could, the stream raged.

Joe Cameron turned away. For the

Richard was a trespasser in time—branded as a

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lunged and drove his sword home

past year he had been proud to look upon that flow of materials forming one of the most intricate machines ever mass produced for the public. But he was not proud of it now. With war upon them it should have been stopped long ago. It could not be stopped because politicians and salesmen balanced currency against lives.

Across the room he stopped beside a production line model of the machine. It was a portable, family-size time traveler.

Harrison McIntyre, ex-insurance hustler, now Sales Manager of Galactic Electronics, had dubbed the machine the Century Hopper. It gave Joe a queasy feeling in his middle, but the name had stuck.

With a Hopper the modern family could take a Sunday afternoon tour in some past era with the same ease they had once roamed the countryside in the family automobile. More than eight million machines had been turned out by

traitor to his era — and the penalty was death!

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Galactic and its dozen or more competitors who were licensed to build similar and, in Joe Cameron's opinion, incredibly inferior machines.

He regarded the model affectionately. It was a beautiful little thing containing the technological skills of generations. Now it and the materials that went into it were needed for a greater utility. It was known that the Jovian colonies were armed and ready to strike, but the Government had put off the restrictions on such vital materials as went into the Hopper for a whole month. And during that month every family in America seemed intent on assuring itself of one of the instruments.

They retailed for a stiff ninety-five hundred, but homes were being mortgaged, cars were being hocked, and twice the price was being passed under the counter to dealers so that the American Family could take one glorious fling and see the past ages of man's history before that history perhaps closed down forever.

It was a foolish and an understandable thing.

But there was yet another reason behind the frantic sales, Joe knew. Hundreds of Hoppers were being bought by Escapers, as they had come to be known. Normal time travel with the Hopper did not involve corporeal transfer to another age. It involved only the picking up of the perceptics of that time in a manner so complete that the traveler was impressed that he was actually in the era chosen.

Yet true corporeal time travel *was* possible—and thoroughly illegal.

PRODUCTION and use of the Hoppers had been licensed only when it was shown that their normal operation would permit no such transfer and interference in the past.

With the fact widely known that corporeal transfer could be accomplished, however, hundreds of citizens, trying to avoid the approaching debacle of their own time, sought to alter the Hoppers to provide an escape for themselves.

The penalty for such intrusion of the past was death.

But they kept trying.

At his desk, Joe resumed the computations he had interrupted for a moment's rest. He had scarcely taken up the computer key when his office door was flung open. Mike Williams, assistant in charge of travel-line allocations, burst in. His voice was cluttered with excitement.

"Joe! Can you stop that shipment that just went out of here?"

"Of course. But why should it be stopped?"

"The travel-line meters—Time Bureau just sent an emergency report of an error made sometime during the past ten days. Ten days—"

The import of his words made Joe Cameron sit very still for just an instant. Then he kicked the foot stop under his desk and leaned toward the little plate on the far edge.

"Production!"

Factory Superintendent Milam appeared.

"Cut the mounting of meters. Put an embargo on all shipments as of now. Don't let a meter get out the door!"

"What's it—", Milam began.

"Tell you later. Be in my office in fifteen minutes."

He called the shipping department then, ordering the immediate return of the trucks that had just left. And next he called the Sales Office. Mac was out. Joe left word for him to call.

The time travelers operated under Government franchise by which they were given specified time lines along which they could move, and which were changed periodically.

In order to make the small portable machines practicable it had been necessary to install reference towers in present time and in the eras of the past. The machines carried their passengers between them as conveniently as cars on a trolley—but the trolley cars had to stick to their assigned line. This factor

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was what had kept time traveling from the public for so long.

On each machine, now, a meter was installed with settings assigned, inspected, and sealed by a Government agency established for the purpose. The setting was so critical that an error in a single one could result in chaos along hundreds of lines and snarl every Hopper moving on them. It was the weak link of the system, but one that had been safely strengthened by incredible duplication of meter inspection.

And now, TB—by which initials the agency was impolitely known—reported a meter error possibly ten days old!

"Maybe this is what we needed," Joe Cameron said slowly. "Maybe we can stretch it out to last a full month, and that will mean the end of production. It could conserve millions of components that we'll need when we convert to war production."

Mike looked at him in perplexity, wondering if he were kidding despite knowing what a meter error could mean, or deadly serious.

But Joe kicked the tab again and called the number of the Sales Office once more. The round, pleased face of well-fed Harrison McIntyre appeared now on the screen.

"Just this minute got your message," he said. "I was about to call."

There was less than normal cordiality in his words. He held the natural suspicions of his kind towards all engineers.

"We have just ordered a shutdown," said Joe. Then he quickly explained the situation.

Mac's face grew horrified. "That's impossible. You can't stop production now. We have the greatest backlog of orders since the production of Hoppers began. We've got to keep them moving as long as the Government will allow."

"The Government as of this moment has ceased to allow," Joe said. "I want you to track down every traveler that has been sold during the last ten days. Check your dealers. Get Federal Investigation in various cities to follow each sale if necessary. We've got to account for every instrument until we find the defective meter."

"There must be some other way!" Mac wailed.

Joe switched off without answering. Mac's back bone consisted of a pair of dollar signs and his head was stuffed with old currency.

Then Joe's eyes turned upon Mike as if challenging him to grasp some far deeper implication of this error.

"TB doesn't make errors that are not picked up for ten days," he said. "You'd better get them to send an Agent or two over here, and bring Federal Investigation along.

"If that meter is used, it will snarl a thousand time lines and open corporeal transfer channels to all the Escapers in

Living History

THE time machine is an indispensable little gadget in any stf writer's bag of tricks, having furnished the ideas for hundreds of provocative and controversial stories. But while readers may argue over the logic, or lack thereof, of time travel, one class of scientists must wish wistfully for a real one—the historians. Think of being able to flit back in time and really hear the immortal words uttered by Charlemagne, George Washington, Adam and Eve!

If you've been curious about it, here's your chance to catch a bit of living history, a look at an England which is gone, yet lives on.

—The Editor

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in every blasted corner of the country.

"Somebody knows that!"

II

MARCUS DAWSON was foreman on the temporal field sub-assembly line. He was a small man with sparse hair. He had the quick, bright eyes and fine hands of a master technician.

For almost a year he had been with Galactic Engineering, and was therefore allowed to buy his Hopper at factory discount. He had resisted the purchase until now.

While his friends and neighbors had unanimously succumbed to the frenzy of attempted relief-from present horror through living in the past, this peeping-Tom invasion of by-gone ages seemed somehow immoral to him.

He was not without curiosity. Long ago, in school, he had enjoyed history. Even now he occasionally picked up a volume of historical analysis and tried to figure out some of the bewildering complexities of his own era in light of the past.

But he knew that most of the Hoppers he helped build were going to people who saw the past only as some vast entertainment. It had no reality. They had no sense of viewing the acts and errors of their own ancestors. In this, to Marcus, lay the immorality, for it denied the reality of the past and thereby of man's own present.

His wife, Dorothy, had no such compunctions. His resistance to buying a Hopper had been a source of friction long before he started working for Galactic. Of recent months it had blazed a constant flame of disagreement between them.

She felt socially ostracized. They were the last in the block without one, and her daily conversations were one-sided listenings to neighbors' reports of gala visits to alien ages.

"We saw the eruption of Vesuvius last night."

"My dear, you should have watched the burning of Joan of Arc."

"Oh—that was nothing beside the sack of Troy!"

But her whining alone would not have led Marcus to buy a Hopper. As it became more evident that the Outer Colonies were going to attack, he felt a kind of fascination about exploring the past in his own way. He felt the need of gaining some kind of understanding of what had gone before, as if there he would find some defining explanation of the present debacle which was sure to wipe man from the Earth. But this, also, was not now the final reason that led him to buy.

It was Richard.

Richard, his son.

Richard with the wild dreams, and the madness that did not belong to this age.

Richard had determined to become an Escaper.

It had begun months ago when Richard was taken from his post at the Regional University and made a Torpedoman aboard a destroyer. He was based on the Moon for training, but on the occasional short leaves at home he pressed his father with the fantastic dreaming with which he constantly lived.

And finally, Marcus Dawson had almost come to believe in those wild dreamings himself. Enough, at least, that together they had planned this thing that was now at hand. Marcus was aware of it with a trembling and tightness in his throat.

During the day he had heard of the embargo on the shipping department and saw the sudden production stoppage. He had not expected it so soon.

But he felt reasonably safe. He had made his purchase days before and set the machine aside uncrated with the understanding that he would transport it home personally. To save costs, he had told them.

So, in the embargo that was clamped upon the plant, there was no thought of the machine that Marcus Dawson had set aside for his own purchase—no

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thought that it was the Hopper for which Joe Cameron and Harrison McIntyre and the entire Galactic staff had instituted so frantic a search.

THE three cases which held the machine's components were heavy, and Marcus was tired that night. He stopped the car beside the house and waited a moment, resting before lugging the machine inside.

Then, suddenly, he felt a broad hand upon his back and turned at the sound of a voice that sent a small chill of pleasure up his spine.

"Hello, Dad—did you get *it?*"

"Dick!" Marcus scrambled out of the car and stood looking up into the face of his tall son.

His hands closed upon the thick biceps that were hard beneath the gray of the uniform. His fingers caressed those arms with sensuous pleasure that almost dimmed his eyes for a moment.

He nodded slowly. "I got it—the right one."

Richard squeezed his shoulders. "Good. Let's get it into the house. Be extra careful around Mom. Don't let anything slip."

"Richard—you're sure you want to go on with this? It isn't too late to pass it up. Tomorrow it will be."

"The whole world has passed up its chances for a thousand years. It's time somebody took one. Please don't argue with me about it again, Dad. Let's go in with it."

There was a return of an old comradeship in working together again. And for Marcus there was a moment's illusion that Richard's days of 14, 16 and 18 were back. But when the three heavy cases were out on the ground Richard straightened up, and then Marcus looked upon the crisp gray uniform and realized that it was only an illusion and those sweet years were gone forever.

"Does Mom know it's coming?" Richard said.

"Yes, she's expecting it. There will be trouble in getting her to agree on a time to visit. I hope you realize that."

"What does she want to see, a twentieth century murder camp?"

"Almost. Mrs. Hawthorne has been telling her of Nero's Rome."

"What would you like to see, Dad—if we were just going to take an ordinary trip tomorrow?"

"I don't know. I've been trying to think. I'd like to see the signing of the Magna Carta, or the writing of the Constitution, or maybe the first Neanderthal who bound up a wounded comrade—and then Christ in Gethsemane."

"But these are the moments of strength that pulled us through. Where are the times when we muffed our chances?"

Richard shook his head. "Those were never written down. You'd have to search the ages minute by minute. And I think in the end you would find no single crucial moment, or even a handful of them. It would be an endless stream of lost moments pouring through every century."

DOROTHY DAWSON was four years younger than her husband. At a short distance she was sometimes mistaken for Richard's sister.

She was not a stupid woman, but she was a product of the culture in which she lived. She felt no links with the past and no reaching out to the future. To her there was no reality in the world that existed before she lived and that would exist when she died. It was strange, Marcus sometimes thought, that she should desire a Hopper so avidly. But in another sense it was wholly consistent. The past was not real. Therefore, it could be endured—as a vast spectacle.

Watching the two men approach the house, Dorothy felt a swift faint burst of panic. It was the togetherness that always wrapped about them and shut her away. With a forced smile, she arose and went towards them with an exclamation of delight.

"You brought the Hopper! Tomorrow

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I'll have something to tell Martha Hawthorne!"

Richard put his arm about her shoulders and squeezed her tightly with bitter and tender understanding in him.

"Maybe not tonight, Mother," he said. "It takes time to set up."

"All right, tomorrow, then. We'll get an early start? And it doesn't matter where we go, just so it's exciting." Her eyes glistened. "Rome is Martha's favorite. She likes to watch the gladiators. But if you know somewhere else that is exciting or different I would rather see it."

"How about something that is not exciting?" said Marcus quietly. "Something that is merely *important*? That ought to hold Mrs. Martha Hawthorne for a while."

Dorothy looked as if to question his senses. "I hope there's not going to be any argument as to where we go."

"Let's sleep on it," said Richard gently. "We'll decide in the morning and take a nice long trip and enjoy ourselves."

"And look," said Marcus brightly, "what do you say that you make the choice as to where we go? Then there won't be any argument about it. How does that suit you, Dorothy?"

She looked at the two of them. It didn't suit her at all. She almost believed that they had agreed upon something already, but she couldn't be sure.

"It's Richard's only night home," Marcus persisted. "He has to catch the rocket Sunday night. We ought to let him make the choice of the first trip our Hopper makes."

"All right," she finally agreed. "But please don't make it something educational, darling, like your father wants. I don't think this head of mine could take it. These people who use the Hopper to *learn* things—!"

III

IT WAS quiet in the house that night. Richard lay on his back with his hands under his head. He was in his own room and in his old bed where the nights of his boyhood had been spent. He had been here before at long intervals since he became a destroyer Torpedoman. Each time he tried to regain something he felt was here, but he was never sure just what he was looking for.

He was trying to recapture the sense of the past that he had known when he and his Dad had made the rocket ship model that hung now from the wall. But the rocket ship remained there, static and unmoving, and there was no real going back to the time when it was made. He sometimes wished it were possible to freeze a segment of time and hold it in one's hands forever. He wondered what moments he would choose if he were able to do that. There had been many when he was home with his father. But he couldn't remember any such moments with his mother, and he wished there were at least one.

Richard Dawson understood himself quite thoroughly. He knew he was an anachronism, despite the fact that he wore the gray of the modern space navy. Before becoming a Torpedoman, he had been a professor of literature at the Regional University. That alone marked him, setting him in remote contact with a world in which literature was only a scholarly curiosity. Nuances and shadings of the written word had long since given way to mere captions appended to pictorial layouts.

His students at the University were a handful like himself who knew that the race had once had something that it no longer possessed.

It was an age of such possession that they were going to see tomorrow—14th century England. The day of Geoffrey Chaucer.

He wanted to visit the year in which the fictional Canterbury Tales took place. And he intended to meet and know the great man who wrote them when the world was in the midst of disintegration and rebuilding.

His mother was dismayed when he announced his decision the next morn-

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ing. "Why should we go there?" she exclaimed. "A dirty little middle-age English town—there's nothing to see!"

"A great man lives there. I hope to get a glimpse of Geoffrey Chaucer. He's the kind of man we could use today—one who manages to live in reasonable harmony with his own time, and to pass something imperishable along to the future."

"But how can I tell Martha Hawthorne about something like that?"

"It would do her good if you tried," said Richard. "Let's have breakfast and get on our way. Dad, bring the catalogue and let's check the meter for that age."

After breakfast, they went into the living room and set up the three specially upholstered time travel chairs which Marcus had bought a couple of days previously. Around the chairs they erected the foot-high grid that resembled a gleaming copper fence. Inside this, they opened the cases of the instrument and connected them with patch cords.

With this simple arrangement they could shift their own space-time line to correspond with the one they desired to view, and pick up the full perceptics of it as if they were actually there. But, not actually being there, they would remain invisible to the people they observed—with normal Hopper operation.

WITH the machine set up, Richard studied the pre-set meter closely, checking its settings against the thick catalogue of available dates.

"Is it the way you expected?" asked Marcus in a whisper. "Will it make corporeal contact?"

Richard nodded. "I think it's right. We can only wait and see now. It's set the way Coleman told me it had to be."

Dorothy Dawson appeared suddenly, still sulky and disappointed at having to waste this first visit of the Hopper on something she couldn't comprehend. She handed Richard the lunch box she had prepared.

"All aboard for Canterbury," he exclaimed. "Canterbury in April. *'Whan that Aprille with his schowres swoote—"*

His mother stared. "What was that?"

"Geoffrey Chaucer—1387. Let's go," Richard laughed.

They settled in the chairs and Richard busied himself over the dials. For just an instant he glanced up at the familiar room. He knew its every scratch and mar, those dating from his own infancy and long painted over. And he would not see this again. He pressed the button.

The customary gray-white blankness surrounded them almost instantly. There was a moment's vertigo for Dorothy, so unfamiliar with the Hoppers' flight. "How long does it take?" she murmured weakly.

"Only a matter of seconds. See, we're coming out of it now." He pointed through the slowly dissolving milkiness, and Dorothy cried out with alarm as she found herself floating apparently in the shining sky.

"There's Southwark," said Richard, "and there's the Tabard Inn. This is where we start."

"There's nothing going on. Let's go somewhere where something is happening."

"Something's happening here," said Marcus excitedly. He pointed over the brow of a low hill towards the setting sun. A column of slowly moving travelers seemed to be approaching the town.

It was like the pilgrims out of Chaucer's story, and for a moment Richard wondered if the story were actually more fact than fiction. The assorted characters were of the motley description recorded by Chaucer. There was a knight. There was a monk. And a woman who surely appeared to be a nun.

"Let's settle somewhere," said Dorothy. "It makes me dizzy hanging here in the air."

Richard brought them gently down to the level of the yard in the ell of the Tabard Inn.

The chairs seemed to settle on the ground with a jolt. Richard's face became grave. He bent over and touched

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the ground in front of him. His fingers made a mark in the dust.

Marcus caught his glance. There was a sudden stillness between them as if they had been caught in a silent pocket of time and space.

Dorothy felt a small chill at the back of her neck. "What is it?" she exclaimed. "What's wrong?"

Marcus slowly drew a line in the dust with the edge of his shoe. "You're not supposed to be able to do that," he said.

"Do what? Have you gone crazy?"

Richard bent over the dials. "We'd better return to make a recheck of our setting. We've made corporeal contact."

Dorothy gave a low cry. "The penalty for that is death!"

"Not if it's accidental," said Marcus harshly. "Something has gotten fouled up with the machine, that's all. Everything's going to be all right now."

AT THAT moment the door of the Inn banged open. A bald, aproned barkeep suddenly appeared on the low porch. He glanced about and then stopped. Then he uttered a scream that pierced the evening stillness and disappeared back into the Inn.

Dorothy touched Richard's arm nervously. "Hurry, they've seen us. We've already committed intervention."

Richard made adjustments and tried the settings. For a moment the scenery about them grew fuzzy again, and then all was as before. Now the door of the Tabard opened cautiously for a second time and a head appeared in the opening, and then another. The barkeep pointed wildly toward them. They could hear the mutterings of his voice, but his words could not be understood.

Richard glanced at the faces in the dorway, and then turned about. Behind them, across the street, small mobs of people had converged at scattered points. They were pointing frenzied fingers at the three.

He spoke then for his mother's benefit. Marcus already knew what he had to say.

"The calibration of the meter by the Time Bureau was not right. We've crossed other time lines and sapped their energy to make corporeal contact. In reverse, our energy is being sucked up by them so we can't return.

"I'm going to set the dials for return to home and then I'm going to get out. Without me the machine may have power enough to return you two. I can be picked up after the time lines are straightened out from the mess this has caused. Tell the Bureau I'll remain in the vicinity and avoid contact."

Fright crossed Dorothy Dawson's face as Richard stepped beyond the copper fence that surrounded them.

"But that will make you an Escaper—and these barbarians will kill you!"

"I can take care of myself. Take it away, Dad!"

He raised his hand in a careless wave that Marcus knew was to be the final message ever to pass between them. Marcus gazed with a moment's intensity to seal the picture of that lean bronze face in his memory forever. Then he pressed the stud on the panel.

The Hopper and its occupants vanished instantly from Richard's sight. And it did not come back. He remained standing alone in the court yard of the Tabard Inn, and the year was 1387.

IV

THE AIR was spring-warm. Scattered clouds, flattened at sunset, floated before the wind in the high reaches of the sky, but about him the breeze stirred only faintly. For a moment there was a strange sensation that nothing had changed.

Suddenly he laughed aloud at the vast masquerade of time.

1387!

2354!

What was the difference? Men of the ages were not separate from one another. All lived simultaneously, and only because of the illusion of time was there thought to be any difference be-

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tween men of one age and those of another.

He started toward the Inn. The cluster of heads in the doorway vanished abruptly, and the door slammed. He raised his voice.

"Innkeeper! May I come in?" And then he stopped. They could not understand him, and he wondered if he could understand anything they said. The Middle Age English of Chaucer with which he was once familiar had been dimmed by neglect and long months in the cruder terminology of the space navy. He tried again in the best imitation he could give of Chaucer's tongue.

"Innkeeper, I am traveling to Canterbury. Can you give me a room for the night?"

There was a moment of silence, and then a voice bawled from the interior.

"Pilgrim of Satan—find lodging elsewhere! Only the pious dwell at the Tabard."

It took a few moments for his mind to grasp the words. But he understood well enough how he must appear in his uniform. Especially to those who had seen the Hopper disappear before their very eyes.

It would have been far more convenient to have come to this age in some remote spot and gradually worked his way into the society, but that was made impossible by the necessity of impressing his mother with the accidental nature of the whole affair. She had to witness to the Time Bureau investigators that he was the victim of some error in the machine, rather than a deliberate Escaper.

It would lessen the intensity of their efforts to return him, and give him precious hours for the welding of his own time band to this age so that he could not be moved from it without *that* act constituting intervention then. Forty-eight hours he had to have. Sixty would make it certain.

From the corner of his eye he could see the clusters growing across the street. Men with staves began to appear and they moved slowly forward. There was no mistaking their hostility. Richard estimated fifty or more approaching from all quarters.

He banged on the door. "Permit a true Christian to enter. I have traveled far to reach the Shrine of Canterbury."

"Satan's dog! You'll never see the Shrine of Canterbury!"

He whirled abruptly at the gruff voice from behind. Then the heavy blow of a hard wood staff crashed against his skull.

He went down on his knees, and blows hammered at him from all sides. His perceptions groggy, he seemed suddenly unable to exert control over the muscles of his arms and legs. Other voices were raised in a bedlam sound, and he heard one nearby call out.

"Bring oil! We'll make a fire!"

He shuddered through the length of his body. Burning—the penalty for witchcraft.

HE PRESSED an arm against his side pocket. He felt the reassuring hardness of the stasis projector with which he could clear the court yard within seconds. But he dared not use the weapon. Such violent intervention would register immediately with the Time Bureau and bring a horde of its Agents down upon him. More important, it would violate all his own precepts which he hoped to strengthen by his coming.

While the search for oil was on there was a momentary lull in the pelting blows upon his back and head. He used this moment to gain a measure of strength and feeling in his limbs, but soon there was a resumption of clamor as someone appeared from within the building bearing a pot of oil.

About Richard staff bearers rested their weapons on one end. He drew himself slowly into a crouch, then sprang suddenly toward the nearest staff. He wrested it from the hands of its bearer and rose in one continuous motion to smash the jaw of the man.

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Then seizing the staff with both hands, he held it horizontal and began to lay it about. He felt an occasional satisfactory crash against a skull, but his skill was poor beside that of the mobbers. Quickly, they drove him against the wall. Others were being added to the fringes of the mob. As he tried to protect his head, his midriff was attacked by sickening jabs that he could not ward off.

He had the conviction that in this utterly absurd way he could die. He weighed that against use of the stasis weapon.

This conviction gave him a new ferocity, and he began working his way toward the oil which had been placed on the porch near the door. Slowly, he forced the mob in that direction. Once there, he gave the pot a kick and spread oil wide along the porch and down upon the ground.

With one hand then he held the staff before him, new blows adding to the already near senseless condition of his flesh. With his other hand he fumbled in a pocket for his lighter. He drew it out at last and pressed the tab, then dropped the tiny torch into the oil pool at his feet. A black, smoky blossom swirled up and fanned out against the ceiling with suffocating power. The mob fell back. Richard pushed his way to the door of the Inn and slammed it behind him.

His first glance showed the place was empty now, and he leaned against the wall in a moment's respite from weariness.

But on the other side he heard dull, snarling thunder of the oil-fed flames. He couldn't remain here long. His problem of sheer survival had doubled. He had to get this mob off his neck now as well as be on guard for TB Agents.

He wondered if the Inn were destined to burn down or if the screaming mob outside would manage to extinguish it. He cared little about that. The chief concern was his slim chance of survival.

Since his uniform marked him, he considered the wild plan of trying to capture a costume from some citizen, but that seemed far from practicable at the moment.

He moved towards the opposite side of the room, sizing up an escape route through a window. He tried to see out to discover if the mob had the place surrounded, hoping for his own destruction with the Inn's burning. The alley there appeared to be deserted. He raised the staff to shatter a window.

AT THAT moment the door behind him was flung open with a crash. He whirled about. Standing there, outlined by the flames, was a massive figure in black armor. It was the knight Richard had seen riding toward town when the Hopper had landed.

With deliberate fury the knight slammed the door against the flames once more. While the hiss of water sounded against the embers, the figure advanced with drawn sword and the ringing sound of armor. Richard's muscles knotted as he gripped the staff. A dozen feet away the knight stopped.

"By 's wounds!" he roared. "What manner of man or devil are you? You wear a dress of which no man has seen the like, and fire drips from your finger tips.

"But perhaps you are not immune to cold steel!"

There was a trace of brutal humor in those eyes that looked out from that dark face. The cheeks were thin and high-boned, and the stubble of whiskers was so black it seemed to have a sheen.

Richard smiled grimly in response to the faint thread of humor. "I assure you I am not immune to steel, and I see no point in testing my immunity at the moment." His hand crept to the weapon in his pocket. "My only desire was to escape being beaten or roasted alive."

"A right good job of that you did, too," said the knight appreciatively. "The way that peasant rabble squealed when you dropped the fire from your fingers was a thing to hear!"

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Then abruptly he looked down at the sword in his hand and dropped it with a hissing into its sheath. "I'll have no need of this," he prophesied. "Man or devil, I've taken a liking to you. And I suspect there are strong stories of far, wild places that you can tell. I'll at least hear them before I am forced to cut your throat."

Richard nodded toward the oily smoke and remaining flames beyond the windows. "Some other time and place?" he suggested.

"Right," laughed the armored man. "Let's go."

Richard began moving toward the rear of the building. But the knight plucked him by the arm with steel fingers. "This way," he cried. "Surely you'll not run from those peasants with Black William at your side."

Richard winced as the knight propelled him toward the doorway and flung it open and marched him through the oily inferno that still raged without.

As they emerged through the ring of flame the mob raised its cry again, and a score of determined peasants and shop keepers bore down.

The knight leaped between Richard and the advancing mob. His sword hissed out and flashed in the twilight.

"Hold your places," he warned, "or you'll deal with the steel of Black William. This man is no wizard of black arts, but a traveler from far lands and a practitioneer of great arts learned in those lands. And now he is a friend of Black William. My sword defends him against any man. Step forward if you have charge against him!"

V

LIKE a line of sullen dogs the attackers turned back to the fire. With spades and buckets they joined the rest in putting out the flames.

Richard watched with the knight. His glance went from face to face among the scurrying crowd, matching them with memories of the faces of his own day. He searched for some defining difference, but he knew that basically there was none. Strip the clothes from their bodies and the habits from their minds and the men of one age would be interchangeable with those of another.

The brain cells were the same. A thousand years had made no profound evolutionary difference. The difference was only in the thoughts upon which those cells functioned.

But, actually, was there any difference here? The rage and fear of the Jovian colonists were the rage and fear of these mobbers of Southwark. The superstitions and ignorance of these were the same as in Dorothy Dawson, Richard's own mother.

He should have gone back farther, he thought. But was there any point in time where the garden of civilization was stronger than the weeds of fear that overwhelmed it in later ages?

Perhaps he should have gone to the future after the stream of time had been cleared by the fire of war. Then perhaps civilization could be planted in the burned-over fields. But that was the thing he could never know for no Hopper built yet could take man to the future. So far, it was a mathematical impossibility.

He felt the sudden grasp of the knight upon his arm once more. "The fire's out, and we have a place to sleep this night," said Black William. "I trust you can enter the Tabard now without burning the place down?"

He clapped Richard on the back with his other mailed hand as if the whole affair had been some enormous joke. Together, they walked to the Inn. The crowd parted before them with grumbling fear. At the door Richard recognized some of the faces that had first peered out at him.

There was the bald barkeep, and the thin man who was the Tabard keeper. He seemed to shake with cold at the approach of the two.

"Please, sires!" he wailed. "Do not enter this Christian place. We will pro-

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vide beds elsewhere, but we ask you not to curse this house by crossing its threshold."

The knight's face darkened. "Christian, you say! And you would turn away Canterbury Pilgrims? Clear the door of this wretched house before we break it in. Prepare the finest of your rooms for Black William and his friend!"

They marched in as if taking possession of the Inn. Some of the bombastic spirit of the knight filtered into Richard, and he began to enjoy the situation.

Quickly, they were led to an upstairs room and shown to quarters, with a fearful courtesy.

"And that's how we have to get service!" Black William slapped his mailed gloves upon the table. "Christian Gentlemen—and they would have us sleep with the dogs!"

THAT evening the Pilgrims ate together at the long table in the main dining hall of the Tabard. Richard was drawn into the group, but only through the personal power of the knight, he knew. Others of the group still regarded him with suspicion—some with outright hostility, and others with a veiled fear.

But to Black William Richard knew he was like some curious treasure from some fabled market place. He doubted there was any friendship in it beyond the enormous lust of the man for the new and the unknown. Yet that was unfair, for Black William's great capacity for absorbing life gave him the gift of prodigal friendship. It would be well to stay in his company as long as he could, Richard decided.

Because few spoke to him, he was able to concentrate on listening to their speech. He was hard put to understand the bulk of it, but his recollection was improving rapidly. He would be able to make out.

There were other considerations, however, that had not been adequately planned for. He thought of the years ahead—the remainder of his life—in this 14th century culture. How would he solve the problem of sheer survival among those people? He had no ready answer for that.

It was not until they returned to their own room that Black William challenged him.

"You owe me a story," he said. "I have saved your life, although perhaps you could have done as well without me, considering the magic at your fingertips. But I have saved you the trouble of destroying the rabble. You owe me now the story of whence you come and of the magic that you practice. You haven't even told me your name!"

Richard lay back upon the pillows and watched the moonlight spilling over the low hills beyond the village.

"My name is Richard," he said. "That name is familiar on your throne. But I am not *that* Richard—I have come from very distant lands."

"Beyond Persia?"

"Far beyond Persia."

"Then how have you traveled? The rabble were saying you appeared out of the air with two others who vanished afterwards."

"That is right. Those are arts that are practised in that far land. And I am not expert in them myself so I cannot travel that way again."

"But why have you come here?"

"I am, let us say—a missionary."

Black William jumped to his feet and stared. "A *what?*"

"Yes. I have come to tell how people live in that land that lies beyond Persia and India."

"How do men live there any differently than we do here?" The knight sank down upon the bed in disbelief.

"There, a man who owns but the shirt on his back does not bow to the man who owns a hundred houses. The life of one is equal in value to that of the other.

"Because a man is poor or ignorant he is not thrust aside or gathered into servitude by those who have more. A great one among them has taught of a Reverence for Life, and it means that all living things are due respect and con-

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sideration because they *are* living."

The knight shifted with a great creaking of the bed slats. "What a world that would be!" he murmured. "The place you speak of is commonly called Heaven by the good Fathers. But you do not look like a man who has been to Heaven. How can such a place be? A man's station in life is governed by his closeness to the throne, or by the lands he possesses and the numbers of vassals he can bring to the king's guard.

"Those are the things that make a man's worth. To be merely alive without any of these is to be less than the stones in the field which are gathered up and cast aside."

"So I have heard," said Richard. "But wouldn't you like to live in this land of which I speak?"

"Of what use would I be there?" said Black William irritably. "My sword and armor are for killing. I know little else. They would have no use for me in this land of yours."

Richard volunteered no more, and Black William lapsed into silence.

WHERE was this land where men lived as he had said? Richard thought. It had never existed in reality, but it was the Utopia of which many had dreamed. A Utopia that some had tried to bring about, succeeding only in building a horrible travesty of the thing they sought.

Black William was right in his doubts. There never had been such a land. And perhaps there never would be. But it was worth the trying until the last man was gone.

He should not have spoken to the knight this way, he thought. Black Williams' life was wholly bound up with buying survival with his sword. He could scarcely understand the dream of human equality. Yet perhaps there was no harm in planting the seed no matter how barren the ground.

He intended to do nothing but survive during the next forty-eight hours. By then his time band would be grafted to this point of the stream securely enough to make him safe from TB's Agents. And with the confusion caused by his Hopper they would not be likely to be overly concerned with him as long as they expected him to desire to return.

After that interval he could proceed with integrating his life with that of this age. He could take steps to seek the acquaintance of the man he had come to see—Geoffrey Chaucer.

He must have slept for a time. When he was conscious again, the shaft of moonlight reached from far higher in the sky. He struggled a moment to understand what had wakened him.

Then he saw the faint glow in the center of the room. The faint, circular glow that could emanate from only one familiar source—a Hopper grid.

He sprang up in bed as he saw the two figures solidifying in the aura. He recognized their rank at once—and knew that the precious margin of time on which he had counted was gone.

"Richard!" One of them spoke his name, sharply, as if he had spoken several times before Richard wakened.

The rapidity of his breath made it difficult to answer for a moment. "Yes—I am here," he said at last.

"Good. Get in at once. We would have been here earlier, but when we tried to make contact we had trouble locating you with the disturbance of the fire and the mob. You shouldn't have made such extensive contact."

"I hardly invited it!"

"Well, never-mind, now. Let's get you back before things get any more snarled."

"No."

"Huh? What was that you said?"

"I said no—I'm not going back with you."

"Are you crazy? That would make you an Escaper!"

"Yes, I guess it would."

The Agents were silent, staring at him speculatively for a long time.

"We didn't come prepared for this," the one said. "But I think perhaps we

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can manage you." He got up to step over the copper grid.

"Don't," said Richard.

"Don't what? You're coming back with us."

RICHARD felt the metal coldness of the stasis weapon beneath the covers. He didn't want to use it. If he killed these two, others would take vengeance regardless of his position in this era. They would be merciless, and relentless.

"Behind you," said Richard softly, "there is a knight who is a citizen of this age. If you step beyond that grid, I'll call to him. He is armed, and you would have to kill him to defend yourselves against him. That would be a first-order intrusion!

"Don't come any closer."

They tried to see his face in the moonlight, but he kept to the shadows beside the window and remained motionless, his weapon in his hand.

The two Agents remained utterly motionless for the time of a dozen breaths. Then slowly they both resumed their chairs.

"I see. I see—and you know, of course, that we'll be back."

"Make it quick. I know the time limit. Already my time band is beginning to weld to this age. Perhaps it is already too late! Have you thought of that?"

Without answer, one leaned over to touch the stud on the panel. Slowly the aura faded and left the room with only the moonlight glowing through the window to light it.

Richard lowered the weapon he held, and he realized how his hand was shaking. His face was covered with moisture that grew cold as the night wind blew in upon him.

He felt as if the spell of that scene had cast him into some trance, and then he knew what it was. There was still a question to be answered, and only with its answer would he find a release. Would he have sacrificed Black William if the Agents had come for him?

Once stated, the question was easily answered.

No.

And it was a commentary on his own day, he thought, that the Agents had believed he would, believed to the extent of abandoning him for the moment.

He knew there was no safety if he slept the remainder of the night. He sat up with his back against the wall, watching the bed across the room and listening to the heavy night sounds of Black William.

There lay survival, he thought. As long as he remained close to the knight, the Agents would find it difficult indeed to remove him without risking severe intrusion on their own part.

Perhaps they might abandon him completely, rather than take such a risk.

If only he could manage another couple of nights without sleep!

VI

MARCUS DAWSON was white-faced as the mist cleared and showed him once again the familiar interior of his own home. As the chairs came to rest solidly on the floor, he switched off the machine and leaned back with a long sigh. His wife stared at both him and her surroundings as if she could scarcely believe that either was real.

She sat still beside him and wiped a trembling hand over her face. "What do we do now?" she murmured. "Richard—we've got to do something to bring him back out of that horrible time."

"The Time Bureau will be working on it already. They have to straighten out the time lines first. Then they'll go after Richard. I'll report our return. Fix a drink, will you?"

Dorothy stepped over the copper fence distastefully, as if the machine had suddenly become some monstrous trap. While she went to the kitchen, Marcus dialed the Time Bureau. The figure that appeared spoke first.

"You're Dawson?" he said. "We've been expecting you. Our meters showed

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your return. You are aware, of course, that your machine was equipped with a defective meter which escaped Time inspection. Our chart shows you landed in 1387 and left one member there to give you sufficient power to return. Can you give us any more details that will help?"

"No." Marcus shook his head. He had the sick feling that TB already knew far too much about the whole thing. "No. I just wanted to report our return. Can we do anything to help in the return of our son?"

"Possibly—just possibly," the operator spoke with an undercurrent of significance that he seemed to expect Marcus would comprehend. "We'll let you know. Our Agents will call for your machine for examination. Do not disturb it."

Marcus switched off and found Dorothy behind him with a pair of drinks for them.

"Is that all they can say," she exclaimed, "they will let us know? Can't they tell us anything that is being done to rescue Richard? He might be killed back there. Why can't you just go back alone and bring him since the machine will carry two?"

"No, no—" Marcus shook his hand impatiently between them. "Every time the machine travels that way it snarls the time lines. They all have to be cleared and special processes gone through to allow deliberate corporeal transfer. Their Agents will have to attend to it. Let's put it out of our minds for the moment."

"Out of our minds! You must be out of yours already. How can we think of anything else while Richard is back there? I wish you had never brought this devilish machine to the house. I never want to see it again."

Abruptly, she kicked at the capper grid surrounding the chairs.

Marcus grabbed her. "Stop it! You'll wreck the machine. Time is going to call for it and we'll be in a nice jam if you wreck the machine. Now sit down and calmn down. Everything is being done that can be done to bring Richard back."

Dorothy left him alone with the Hopper. He sat down across from it and stared as if it were some vicious entity. He tried to keep from thinking of Richard—and thought of nothing else. He wiped at his forehead and brought his hand away with a feeling of scumminess.

Was Richard dead or alive by now?

THE AGENTS came for the machine in late afternoon. When Marcus opened the door for them he was suddenly aware of his disheveled appearance. His face was sweaty and his shirt crumpled. His hair was awry from the hundred rakings his nervous fingers had given it.

"We left it just like we had it set up," he said.

The taller Agent nodded. "That's good. We were afraid you might make some change. It will be easier this way."

Easier for what? Marcus did not know. He felt that when the machine was gone a big load would be off his shoulders. He watched the men carefully disconnect the patch cords and close the cases. They rolled up the grid and moved toward the door with the components.

"You're to come with us, Mr. Dawson. You and your wife. The Chief of Time asked that you return with the machine. He's personally interested in this case."

A new layer of perspiration burst upon Marcus' face, sending ripples down his jowls.

The Agent seemed to be aware of it. "I don't know what they want, but this is by way of an order, you understand."

"Yes, yes, of course. We will do anything we can to help, but they could have told me when I talked with them this morning."

"We'll be waiting for you outside."

Dorothy was asleep upstairs when he called her. She roused irritably and demanded of him the same questions that

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flooded his mind already. He shook his head and wished his hand would stop trembling and his face sweating.

For the first time since their return Dorothy got a good look at him. "What in Heaven is the matter with you? Your face looks like a chunk of wet plaster."

"Richard's my son as well as yours," he snapped.

At the offices of the Time Bureau Marcus and Dorothy Dawson were led into a conference room. John McRae, Chief of the local Bureau, greeted them personally. He took Marcus' hand with a firm grasp, his smile reflecting the courteous sympathy of a man who understood their feelings concerning Richard's safety. He indicated seats at the conference table.

"We have some other gentlemen coming in a moment," he said.

His courtesy failed to set Marcus' mind at ease. In spite of the seriousness of the accident there seemed to be too much of an air of detective inquiry. The feeling heightened as the others came in.

There was Joe Cameron of Galactic, with whom Marcus was briefly acquainted. The engineer greeted him with strict formality.

Then came Dr. Mortimer Sondermann, the philosophical historian and supreme authority on the mathematics of time travel. His presence sent a chill blasting down to the end of Marcus' spine.

And there were others, an even dozen of them altogether, but Marcus felt as if his thinking process had stopped the moment the goateed Sonderman shook his hand cordially.

"Several unusual aspects of this accident," McRae began when they were all seated, "have made it necessary to conduct more than routine investigation in order to rectify the error and determine its cause.

"Mr. Dawson, will you briefly give us the story of your purchase of the Hopper and of your trip to the 14th century?"

Marcus cleared his throat. "Of course." He gave an even account of events from the time of his picking up the Hopper to the present.

"Thank you," said McRae, when he finished. "As a foreman on one of the assembly lines, you had the opportunity to pick out your own machine as it moved from the line. Is that right?"

"Yes, of course. As I said, I had made arrangements with Sales to take my company discount on the machine. There's nothing unusual in that."

"The significance lies in the fact that you took the machine with the mis-set meter."

Marcus bristled and half rose from his chair. "What would I do a fool thing like that for? Being a foreman on the line, I know how the machines work. I certainly wouldn't take home a defective one knowingly!"

"No. No—you wouldn't—not unless you wanted it for a specific purpose. A purpose such as that which has already been carried out."

Marcus grew cold, and Dorothy could feel him trembling. "And what would such a purpose be?" he demanded.

"The purpose might be to allow Richard to escape into the past from whence he had no intention of returning."

"That's a lie," breathed Marcus. "You can never prove such a thing. And if you are refusing to help bring Richard back on the basis of such a lie it proves your own malicious intent in this matter. I demand to know what has been done to bring him back."

"I can tell you very easily. Our Agents have already contacted him."

Dorothy rose. "Where is he?" she cried. "Why won't you let us see him? Bring him to us!"

McRae shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Dawson. You see, your son Richard has refused to return."

SHE SANK down again, her face set and still, as if a thousand uncomprehended perceptions suddenly fitted into place. She turned her face toward Mar-

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cus with a stunned accusation that no one else saw.

Then she faced McRae again. "It's impossible! He promised us this morning—I mean he said he'd be waiting for arrangement to be made to bring him back."

"I'm sorry. All I can tell you is what our Agents reported. And I'm hoping that you and Mr. Dawson can help us find an explanation and plan our next move."

"There's the law against—"

"Exactly," said McRae, "there's the law against corporeal return. Let's talk some more about the Hopper with the defective meter," he said to Marcus.

The meter was in front of him. He passed it along to Marcus. "We were particularly interested in the inspection mark which the instrument bears."

"What about it? It's the usual square stamp with the inspector's initials in it."

"Correct. But you will notice that the stamp seems to be a little defective in that two opposing corners are indistinct, as if the stamp had been cut."

"The stamps get worn," said Marcus doggedly.

"But we found an operator who possessed a new stamp which had been cut in that manner. But it was not used to mark any other meters but this one. Now, can you tell us anything that will explain this unique stamp on the defective meter?"

With the meter in his hands, Marcus stared before him. "No, there's nothing more that I can tell you."

McRae's voice was resigned. "Well, we have someone who can." He motioned to an Agent. "Get Coleman in here."

The Agent stepped to the hall. In a moment he returned with another man.

Marcus Dawson glanced at the newcomer; involuntarily, he started. McRae caught it.

"You know this gentleman?" he said.

Marcus shook his head. "Never saw him before in my life."

The man's eyes were focused on Marcus. "I'm sorry, Mr. Dawson," he said slowly. "They know. They forced me to tell—you know how they can do that."

"We considered it important enough for that," McRae offered in explanation.

Marcus exhaled a deep breath, and for the first time his hands on the table ceased their faint trembling. His face felt dry as did his tongue and throat. He seemed calm as he had not been before.

"So you know," he said. "Is this a trial?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Dawson," said McRae. "It is rather a plea for your help in rectifying the damage which is done. Or should I say preventing the damage which will come quickly if the error is not rectified. Will you give us that help? Will you persuade Richard to come back voluntarily so we will not have to risk further intrusion to force him back?"

Marcus shook his head. "There is nothing I can do, and I would not if I could."

Dorothy cried out in a voice whose anguish had reached the breaking point. "Tell me what you are talking about! I can't stand this any longer. Tell me what this means!"

"Doesn't she know?" said McRae.

"No. It was wholly between Richard and me."

"Tell me," said Dorothy. "I've got to know what this is all about!"

VII

THE YOUNG man named Coleman spoke now. "May I explain?" he said. "You've forced me to give you the bare facts of what I did to help Richard, but you haven't listened to the reasons. Will you let me tell?"

"Go ahead." McRae nodded.

"As most of you know, I'm a calibrator for the Time Bureau," said Coleman. "I set Richard Dawson's meter the way he wanted it and marked it so Mr. Dawson could pick it up off the assembly

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lines at the plant. Everything would have gone as planned except that the random audit at the calibration center turned up a record of one less meter set in a specific channel. That was the meter I had worked over. The records couldn't be tampered with. The random audit was the chance we took. Two more days would have been enough."

"Enough for what?" prompted McRae gently. "Most of us know these facts already."

Coleman took a deep breath. "Enough to change the world," he said.

His face seemed to light up, but the others at the table became as grim as executioners. Only Marcus and Dorothy — and Mortimer Sondermann — remained as if they understood.

"I first met Richard Dawson when I was at the University," said Coleman. I was in Time Engineering, and registered for his class just out of curiosity because I had an empty period in my last year. That's how I learned how much the whole world has shut its eyes and squeezed itself into a tiny, dark ball, retreating to embryo.

"Richard taught me how the artistic expression of a correct idea is far more important than all the technology we've amassed since Neanderthal. He taught me to understand that the most important idea ever conceived is the great Schweitzer's 'Reverence for Life.'

"The earlier in a culture that men become individuals of equal worth instead of cogs in a social machine, the more certain is the survival of that culture. Our tragedy is that it was conceived so very late in time and is far from being fully practised even now. He proposed to do something about that."

"How?" said Sondermann suddenly. "How could he change that culture pattern, one man all by himself?"

"You can change the future by planting an idea in the past," said Coleman slowly. "The idea of man's worth—Reverence for Life."

"The idea has to be implanted in men," said Sondermann, "many men. One is not enough. No one man is strong enough to change deliberately the course of civilization in a chosen pattern. The only effect possible is a random one. That is why we have forbidden corporeal transfer and placed upon it the penalty of death. Was your Richard Dawson unable to comprehend this?"

"He comprehended those objections—but he did not believe them. It is true that an idea must be planted in a man, but it is not true that one man cannot change the course of civilization. If that were true you would not be afraid of corporeal transfer."

"What we are afraid of is the random intrusion. Please try to understand that. One man *can* change it—but not predictably.

"At any rate, exactly what does Richard Dawson propose, or does he have no set plan?"

"He has a plan. He chose carefully the age and the man to whom he intends to give this new idea. The essential element of an idea in the beginning is its communication to those who can use it. He had to choose a point at which such communication was available."

"I'd hardly say communication in the 14th century was adequate," snorted one of the engineers.

Coleman ignored the interruption. "Literature is the form of communication available, and the first great writer whose own temperament is suitable is Geoffrey Chaucer. It is he whom Richard is searching, with whom he intends to become friends and impart the idea of Reverence for Life and equality of men's worth. No other man of that age could spread the idea so widely as the poet Chaucer."

Joe Cameron slapped his hands suddenly on the table in front of him and shifted in his chair as if in genuine agony. Then he swore bitterly.

"Of all the fuzzy-headed, screwball concoctions of stupidity I ever listened to, this absolutely wins the little brass knob! I was expecting perhaps that he

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might have been looking for Francis or Roger Bacon, at least—!"

SLOWLY, Sondermann removed a long cigar from his mouth and wagged it at the engineer. "Not so—not so. I think the man is to be commended for his logic, if not for his wisdom. What Richard conceives is an affair of the emotions, not merely of the intellect, and he could have chosen no more precisely than he has to communicate widely to the people of succeeding centuries. Provided, of course, that he can so influence the poet, and provided about ten thousand other variables fall precisely the right way—it is these that doom the ambitious notion to failure."

Coleman looked about him as if hesitant to speak further. At last he went on. "When Richard came to me for help, I objected, too. But it is his thesis that the world has failed because its strong men and its strong ideas seldom get together.

"There have been men who dreamed great dreams, but did no more than dream, and there have been strong men who churned up the world for want of something better to do. If the great and strong ideas could be planted in the strong men, perhaps some order could be brought out of chaos."

Sondermann smiled indulgently and shook his head. "You cannot generalize about history or men so naively. It could as well be argued that the strong man will create his own ideas, and be impervious to those of others. No, it depends on the man, and you cannot predict men."

"You can take a chance," said Coleman. "There's nothing we've got to lose. We've lived in terror of our own technology for generations. Now it looks as if all we've feared is about to come upon us. We've nothing to lose! Nothing whatever!"

He sat down. The eyes of the others slowly left him and turned to each other.

McRae turned to Marcus. "You have no desire to withdraw from this wild plan of your son—even at this point?"

"I agree with you that it is a wild plan, and a foolish one. But I agree also with Coleman: We have nothing whatever to lose. And how many of us have the courage to even attempt the realization of dreams any more?"

For the first time, McRae's face settled into lines of antagonism.

"The courage to pursue a self-determined course does not enter into this. The fate of all mankind does enter into it. And we have a great deal more to lose than your suicidal desperation credits.

"If you will assist in persuading Richard to return, we may be able to offer you some personal mitigation of the penalty for this crime."

"But for Richard there will be none."

"Justice demands that we hear every explanation Richard may wish to offer. But I can conceive of none that will excuse him. He will be brought back. We are asking you to assist in persuading him that he must return before irreparable damage has been done. Will you do so?"

"Yes!" cried Dorothy.

"No," said Marcus.

"I see," said McRae. "Then our Agent, Mr. Kaufman, here, has his instructions. Richard will be returned by force, and penalty will be applied after due processes of law. If we are unable to return him, he will be subject to execution where he is. That is all."

With a surveillance tab sealed to his arm, Marcus Dawson and Dorothy were allowed to return to their home. The day had turned grey and dismal while they were in the offices of the Time Bureau. The sky was spitting sharp, cold rain.

They could hear the distant whine of space jets arising at minute intervals from nearby fields and disappearing beyond the clouds. It was a constant sound that wrapped the city day and night. And people lived with it as with their own heartbeat.

But Marcus stopped to listen, his face

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upturned to the gently falling rain.

"No one notices any more," he said. "Can you imagine what it would be to live in a world without that sound?"

"We *couldn't* live without it," said Dorothy. "The Jovian Colonies would have annihilated us long ago. It's easy to see where Richard got his craziness. I'll bet you talked him into the whole foolish scheme. And you'll be responsible for his death."

The word was like a trigger. She suddenly stopped, her face white and eyes staring at the sky. "They can't kill him. They can't do that to Richard. Oh, Marcus—Marcus, what are we going to do?"

He patted her arm gently. "I don't think they'll get him, Dorothy. He knew this was coming. He planned to take care of it."

VIII

I SAW it," Black William whispered out of the darkness across the room. "I swear I saw it. You were talking to them in that bubble of light, and they disappeared into thin air."

Richard started. He hadn't been aware that the knight was awake. He chilled at the thought of what might have happened if Black William had moved.

"I couldn't understand what you were saying," said the knight. "Were they your friends come to take you away?"

"No. They're not my friends. They came to take me back to kill me. Now they'll try to kill me here. Any moment, they may come again."

"Why didn't you call?" the knight roared. He grabbed up his sword. "I could have clipped the heads of both of them before they knew it. Unless they were spirits who cannot be touched by steel."

"They can be touched. Perhaps I will call if I see them coming again in the night like that. Two more nights, and I'll be safe from them if I can hang on that long."

"Why didn't you tell me? We can sleep by turns. But come, the cock announces day. We've got to get you a garb and a mount. You cannot walk to Canterbury."

Richard realized somewhat groggily that daylight was indeed upon them. He was depressed by the encounter with the Agents. It should not have come so soon unless something were wrong back home.

They had obviously suspected him or they would not have been so prompt. Did it mean they had got to Coleman or his father and made them talk? There was no way to know. All the advantage from here on was with the Time Bureau. His only ace was the presence of Black William, and the stasis weapon, which he would use only in last-ditch self-defense.

His brief talk with Black William in the night had given him a renewal of his own convictions. But now in the cold morning light he saw only the crude room without plumbing or communications. And he saw in his companion only an unkempt knight of the 14th century, whose trade was death.

He had come far to plant a seed, and the ground looked exceedingly sterile. But this was only the effect of his own depression, he told himself. There was a life ahead of him in this age. And there was no turning back.

To survive for a few more hours was the goal, and then he would be free forever.

He regarded his companion as they dressed. "I am afraid I will not be able to buy a horse or clothing. I have no money that will be acceptable in this town. Would it be possible to loan—"

"I am not a rich man," said Black William, "but all I have belongs to my friends. We will see you are fitted. Can you use a sword?"

"Not without cutting myself, I'm afraid."

"That you must learn. At least a dagger must be worn. You cannot travel these roads defenseless."

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The sun had risen through the morning mist by the time they completed breakfast. The rest of the pilgrims started on their way to Canterbury. Black William promised them he and Richard would catch up to them during the morning. Then he took Richard to a tailor and a livery to fit him with clothes and horse.

As Richard viewed himself in the finest velvet jacket in the shop he began to feel a part of the age in which he had come to live.

"A right splendid gentleman!" roared Black William with pleasure as he clapped him on the back.

"Think I can pass for one of you now?"

"All except the hair. You look like a shorn lamb. Perhaps a wig for a time—"

"I'll let it grow. I'll practise with this dagger on anyone who remarks about it."

SUNLIGHT was warm on their faces as they followed the winding road from Southwark. Richard was unaccustomed to riding, but he felt the thrill of the vibrant life of the animal beneath him, a white, broad-backed stallion.

The countryside was tinted with the delicate yellow-green of early budding and the air was smooth with the scent of blossoms. It was a wonderful day and a wonderful age in which to live, Richard thought, in contrast with his morning depression. If all mankind could be frozen forever into some quiet year of time like this, their troubles would be over.

And then he remembered that across the Channel Englishmen and Frenchmen were dying at each other's hands in the bloody and fruitless Hundred Years War.

"Have you fought across the Channel?" he asked suddenly of his companion.

"Fought and bled," the knight growled. "I fought to please Edward and his merchants and got a sword stroke in my leg for reward. I went again for Richard on the throne and almost lost an arm. Because my health is good today I am making this pilgrimage."

"You do not like the fighting?"

"I can fight as well as any man, but I am much older than you, lad," said Black William. "When I was younger I liked the fighting because it was fighting. But after my first wound when I was dragged from the battle field I discovered that I had been quite blind.

"There's no worth in fighting if you have no goal for which to fight. Since that time I have hunted in every land to find a worthy goal to loan my sword."

"And the goal you found?"

"I have not found it. I have been to Spain and to Jerusalem and to Egypt. I have been to Germany and to France and I have fought now for Richard because my loyalty tells me I must.

"But I have not found a goal. Edward's war was not just. It still is not. The French have no heart for it, either. But who is going to cry halt? War's a black monster which men unleash, and too late they learn they cannot chain it again."

"What kind of goal would be worth the fighting?"

"I don't know. But I've been thinking of what you said last night—all the world a land in which each man is of worth because of himself. I think I should like to live in a land like that, after all."

"It has to be made that way," said Richard. "It doesn't come by accident. Thieves have to be thrown down from the throne and the seats of law. Strong men have to see to the rights of those not strong enough to defend themselves."

"By 'swounds!" exclaimed the knight. "It is almost a vision that you give me. It would be almost worth the risk to throw down my cousin and his scoundrels in the palace and find me an honest man to rule the land!"

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Richard's hand tightened the reins involuntarily. "Cousin, you say?"

Black William nodded. "Distant, but still a cousin. It gives me but little voice with the throne, but actually my lineage is as clear as his."

They followed a turn between cool, overhanging trees. Then at a distance ahead they saw a small dust cloud. In its center were the figures of two friars on asses.

"It looks like company," said Black William. "I wonder if they are going to Canterbury."

The larger steeds quickly approached the friars, who parted on either side of the road to let them pass. They raised a hand in greeting, and one of them called out.

"Good gentlemen, we are waiting for the pilgrims to Canterbury. Can you tell us if they are still behind?"

"They are ahead, Friar. We are riding to catch them now. If you can hurry those short-legged asses, perhaps you can reach them by noon."

"I told you we were wrong," said the Friar on the other side of the road. "We have been jogging slowly to let them catch us. Perhaps you gentlemen will not mind if we trail beside you."

"We are in no great hurry," said Black William. "If you can hurry those animals a bit we'll ride together."

FOUR abreast, they resumed riding. Soon, however, the road narrowed and Richard found himself drawing behind with one of the friars, while Black William and the other rode just ahead.

The friar beside him was a round, sleepy character who jogged ridiculously on the ass and hummed a pleasant melody all the while. He seemed not to notice that he was falling behind.

Richard slowed out of courtesy as the gap between the pairs widened. When the forward ones disappeared momentarily around a sharp outthrust in the road Richard turned to request his companion to speed up.

He did so. And then his eyes caught the beady eyes of the man beside him. He *knew* this was no friar.

"Let us ride more slowly now," said the man. "When the others are completely out of sight we will return to the Hopper just a half mile back."

Instantly, Richard spurred his horse and leaned down against its neck. He heard a single burst of faint humming behind him and saw a clump of foliage ahead disappear in a haze of almost colorless smoke.

Then Black William was in sight, and the Agent dared not shoot again.

"Your aim is bad," Richard whispered as the pseudo-friar caught up. "Why don't you just go back and tell them I'm not coming?"

The Agent smiled easily. "No, I think not. You'll be coming with us—or we'll leave you dead!"

At that he jogged the ass and rode even with Black William and his fellow Agent, leaving Richard alone in the rear.

Tempted, his hand crept near the weapon in his pocket. Two short blasts and he would be rid of these two, at least. And with the time channels cleared for corporeal transfer, it would be a while before the murder would be discovered, for no one could travel here by normal Hopper operation now.

But apart from his inability to kill them, there was a practical advantage in leaving them alive. As long as he kept them occupied by crossing wits with them he had the forces of TB tied up. Every hour lent him advantage.

They rode thus strangely th rest of the morning. The Agents seemed utterly cocky in their ability to predict Richard, and it made him uncomfortable. He believed they were not aware that he was armed, but apart from this they seemed too completely careless.

With William, they kept up a steady chatter. Richard wondered at their quick training. Hypno-learning, obviously, but their language was better than his own.

They broke into bawdy song that

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seemed to insult the spring morning. Black William was amused by their joviality.

By noon they reached the main body of the pilgrims who had stopped at a village to eat. Richard considered abandoning the pilgrimage and making a flight from the Agents. Yet that was probably the exact thing they were trying to provoke. His safety lay in remaining close to the big knight who had undertaken to offer him his sword. His presence neutralized any violence the Agents might use, unless they finally risked the intrusion that injury or death to Black William would cause.

The four of them sat at a table together. The Agents continued their pose of joviality, utterly secure in their knowledge that Richard would not betray them to Black William. They concentrated all their attention on the knight.

And then when the meal was served Richard understood their objective. It began with great tankards of ale. One by one, the Agents poured them down Black William.

Ale and roast pig seemed to constitute the meal. The knight consumed vast quantities of both. Helplessly, Richard watched him become more and more drunk. For himself he ate little and drank less.

AT LAST he stood up with slow deliberation. "I am going out for a minute," he said. "Will you see to it that our friar friends do not leave? I could not bear to go the rest of the journey without their company."

"Why, sure! You weren't thinking of deserting us, were you?" The knight's arms went out and wrapped around the necks of the two Agents in fierce playfulness.

The one who had threatened Richard let out a stranged gasp as the clutch reduced his breathing capacity.

Richard walked hurriedly toward the doorway. Halfway there, he heard the mock-drunken shout of one of the Agents who had gained a voice.

"Let's give the man a bath!" he cried.

It startled the knight's befuddled faculties, but he seemed to sense that somewhere here was riotous fun.

"Who—who do we give a bath?"

"Your friend, Richard," said the Agent. "He stinks. Let's bathe him in the stream across the road."

Richard ran for the door as Black William took it up in an unmusical chant: "Let's give the man a bath, he stinks."

Their horses had been taken to the rear of the Inn by the grooms for feeding and watering. There was not time to get his mount with the Agents in pursuit.

He started across the narrow courtyard towards the stream in which the Agents proposed to duck him. If he could make it across he would be safe in the woods beyond for a time. He was bewildered by the proposal to throw him in the stream. But he supposed it was the Agents' ruse to keep him from getting away.

The plumpness of the men was deceptive. Their training in their trade was as good or better than his Navy work. They bore him down with a flying leap at the edge of the water.

Ambling more slowly and unsteadily behind came Black William, his great voice roaring with laughter.

"Give the man a bath," he called. "He stinks."

His sword playing against his leg, the knight waddled up. The agents gripped Richard's arm with cool ferocity. One mumbled in his ear, "We said you'd be going back, and you will!"

"Help!" cried Richard. "These crazy friars are trying to drown me. Give them your sword, William."

While he struggled against their grasp, Black William laughed. "Ah, Richard, our little friars would not hurt you. They only want to give you a bath. And I think they're right. You need one, friend Richard. Heave the man in!"

Richard faced the stream, and sud-

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dently stared in disbelief into the crystal waters. There on the stream bed was a circular grid. The unmistakable copper grid of a Hopper, waiting for him to be thrown into it, triggered for action as he fell.

He felt stunned by the detailed planning this reflected. How carefully the Agents had led him to this very moment, he thought.

Suddenly he sagged in their grip. Thrown off balance, they shifted their hold. With a mighty lunge, he tore loose from them, and hurled himself into the water beyond the copper fence.

Swimming rapidly, he crossed the narrow stream and struggled up the bank. Only then did he look back. He was greeted by the sight of both Agents aiming carefully in his direction with their stasis projectors.

With a wild cry, he flattened himself against a fallen log that partway shielded him. He dragged at the weapon in his pocket, but the wet fabric imprisoned his hand.

Black William sensed abruptly the change in the two friars. Their jovial nonsense was gone, and in their stance he detected deadly menace.

He leaped toward them and circled the pair of them with his great arms. Before they could shift aim and secure the death of Richard, the knight lifted them to the air and hurled them into the waters below.

Richard lay a moment in exhausted reprieve as the turmoil in the water subsided. He understood what had happened. But Black William was far from understanding. He continued to stare at the point where the two friars had entered the water—and disappeared.

"They're gone!" he suddenly roared across to Richard. "They're gone!"

"Yes, they're gone," sighed Richard. He flung himself into the water and returned to the other side. Dripping, he stood beside Black William, who was considerably sobered by the experience.

"They were my enemies," Richard said. "They tried to kill me. They got you drunk so that you would not come to my help."

"Drunk! There's not enough ale in all England that will make Black William drunk." He fumbled at his sword and sheath. "You cannot say that about Black William, friend Richard!"

"All right. All right! I'll take it back. Come on, let's join the others and get on our way."

IX

THEY would be back, and quickly. Whatever guise or deception they chose, the advantage would be all theirs. He could only slug blindly through the next hours, guarded by the single fact that they dared not risk intrusion. But perhaps, at the end, not even that would spare him.

He knew that Coleman must have broken by now, and he wondered about his father. It meant death for them, too, if they had been found out.

He felt that the narrowness of the last encounter had all but taken the heart out of him. He recognized that his hopes of surviving long enough to meet the poet and expounding to him the dream of human equality were slimmer by the hour.

But there was one thing yet that he could do. One thing that might escape the attention of the Bureau. He spoke of it to William as they settled at another inn for the night.

"There is something I want you to do for me," he said. "I may not be with you much longer. Those you saw today will come again, and they are not going to leave me alive if they can help it.

"I'm going to write a paper tonight and I want you to promise you will find the poet Geoffrey Chaucer and deliver it to him. Will you promise me that, Black William?"

The knight nodded. "Of course I'll promise, but there is no reason to abandon your life to those who seek it. Is not my word good enough to protect you? We could get a hundred others if

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need be. Black William is not without friends."

Richard shook his head. "No number of swords could protect me at the end, if I can't outwit them with my mind. They have weapons of which you never dreamed. The ones you saw today can kill a man at a thousand paces."

"What kind of arrow could fly that far?"

"It is not arrows they use. Now let me write my paper. You sleep first, and I'll wake you when it is done."

He sat up in bed and wrote by the bright moonlight that poured through the window. He wrote slowly and with anguish, wondering how he could best reach the mind and heart of the poet across a thousand years of time.

He told about Reverence for Life and the dreams of men for equality and understanding. He told of the dream that could come true only when these things were practised. He asked the poet to write of these things—of the dignity and worth of man—to preach it down through the ages.

It took him more than half the night and when he was through he continued to sit there staring beyond the pages to the silver village outside.

This was about all that he could do, he thought. It wasn't very much, but he wasn't sorry that he had taken the gamble. He would take it again, knowing the chances were no better. He put the papers away. Tomorrow he would give them to Black William and trust that the knight would get the manuscript to Geoffrey Chaucer.

If the Agents learned of it, they would have on their hands the combating of the knight and the poet. By that time perhaps it would have gone too far for them to break its influence on this band of time.

He turned away. He ought to rouse the knight and get a little sleep for himself, he thought, but he felt that it would be difficult to go to sleep.

A little longer. . . .

And then the short hairs on the back of his neck began to prickle. A bubble of light was growing in the center of the room.

He reached frantically for his stasis projector, and cried out to the knight.

"William! Your sword. They're coming again!"

He heard the thundrous creaking of the bed across the room and the hiss of the sword in its sheath. The light grew and then dimmed as two figures appeared within.

Roaring a curse, Black William lunged and drove his sword home. A cry of agony crashed through the night. And then Richard was aware of his own voice screaming:

"Stop it! Stop, William!"

The fallen figure lay in the moonlight with a darkening stream pouring out upon the floor. Beside it, the other knelt with hysterical screams.

Richard stood a frozen instant staring down at the face of his father.

William hovered at one side, breathing hard with fury, his dripping sword in one hand.

"What is wrong?" he cried. "What's the matter with you, Richard?"

"It's my mother and father," said Richard.

He fell upon one knee beside Marcus Dawson. "Dad—Dad!"

Black William's voice was agony now. "Richard, I didn't know. You called to me."

RICHARD made no answer. He ran his fingers through his father's hair and felt of the wrist for sign of life. His mother's cries had dropped to deep and agonized sobbing and she hid her face from him.

Slowly, Marcus' eyes fluttered open. He looked up with a faint smile on his face and saw Richard. "It's all right, Richard," he murmured. "I understand."

"Don't talk now. You'll be all right."

"No—I only have a moment, I know. Listen to me. The Bureau sent me to try to persuade you to come back. They

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know everything. They suspected Coleman and broke him down after you left.

"Finally, I agreed to come and talk with you to get you to come back. But that's not what I came for. I wanted you to know that I'm still for you. I want you to go on, no matter what they try to do to you. Spend your life at it. It's worth it. There's nothing back there for any of us.

"And I wanted to warn you. The Agents have orders now to kill you on sight."

"Never mind now, Dad, I understand. Please don't talk any more."

But the older man struggled and fumbled at his side. He slipped a strap from his pocket and drew out a small, flat case with a dial on the face of it.

"Coleman and I managed to put this together for you. It was almost ready when you left. Coleman managed to finish it up and get it out of the Bureau lab after he was questioned. They let him in to get his personal things."

"What is it?"

"A protective circuit. It's a dephaser that will throw you out of time phase with any Hopper the Agents use to approach you. It's good for five hundred hours. That ought to be long enough.

"Just turn it up when they approach. Nothing they can do will affect you as long as you are out of phase with them. It's fool proof, Richard. Now go on and do what you have planned to do. I won't be—"

Abruptly, Marcus stiffened in agony. His eyes closed as he gave a single terrible gasp. Then only the sound of Dorothy Dawson's sobbing broke the silence of the room.

He drew her up to the bed beside him and they sat together for a long time. There was nothing he could find to say to her. It was she who finally spoke.

"You'll come back now, Richard? You can't let me go back alone. I couldn't bear it."

"You know what they'll do to me if I go back. You know the penalty for what I have done."

"But surely not now. You can tell them something that will make them understand—I know you can. You can say it was Marcus who led you to do this, that it was not your fault. Tell that you are sorry for what you have done."

He could never make her understand, he thought. Never, as long as she lived.

"You heard what Dad said. It cost him his life. But he wanted me to go on. You couldn't ask me to stop now."

Dorothy looked down at the body of her dead husband. She looked at his moonlit face for a long time and somehow there seemed a quietness and serenity there that she had never noticed when he was living. Yet it had been there, she thought. A faint glimmer of understanding seemed to come to her. She did not understand Richard, but Marcus had understood him, and through him she grasped a little of the dream that Richard followed. But only a little.

"I won't ask you to stop," she whispered. "I'm ready to go back now. Help me before I lose the little courage I've got."

He moved the chairs and arranged his father's body inside the grid. Then he checked the adjustments and showed her which button to push to thrust her back to her own time forever.

He stepped out and watched her take her seat before the panel. For a moment his eyes caught hers in the half darkness, and then she was swiftly gone.

The room was the same as before—except for the dark stain that had soaked into the boards of the floor outside the copper fence.

"Richard—Richard," groaned Black William.

They sat together on the edge of the bed during the rest of the night, neither speaking nor moving. Once Black William put his arm about Richard's shoulders, but Richard hunched over, burying his face in his hands.

In a little while, daylight began to burn through the morning mist.

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X

IT WAS Richard who moved first. He stood up, running his hands through his hair, wiping the sweat from his face.

"You will go on with us?" said Black William.

Richard nodded. He gathered up the papers he had written the night before. "Take these," he said. "These are the things I told you I would write. Guard them with your life. If I am killed, get them to the poet.

"Whether it will do any good or not I don't know, but I want to know that he will receive them."

"I promise," said Black William solemnly. "It shall be done. But your life shall not be lost while I am near. Mine is forfeit to you forever."

"No, I would not have it that way." Richard put a hand on the knight's shoulder. "When I called to you last night I thought it was my enemies. The last persons in the world I expected to see were my parents. I didn't know. And surely you could not."

Before he dressed, he examined the black box which his father had brought. It gave him a new confidence to face this day that would be his most critical one. He did not know how such a device could work, but he trusted his father and Coleman to construct it workably.

He blinked bitterly as he held the gift—the gift of life.

The face of the device contained only an indicator dial and a switch. He pushed the switch and watched the needle flick over. There seemed no apparent change about him, but he assumed that it was working. He switched it off and attached it to a shoulder band.

Leaving the room, he peered cautiously in every direction. The party of pilgrims was already assembled in the dining hall for breakfast.

He stopped on the stair landing and tried to discern any newcomers to the group. He kept his hand on the bottom of the black instrument case.

He seated himself carefully at the table. Black William he kept on his left. On his right was a fat little merchant he'd become acquainted with the first day of the trip. He took food only from those plates from which others had been served first.

He watched for any approach from behind.

He recognized that undoubtedly there were TB Agents planted in the group. Without them, it would have been difficult to watch him so closely.

Greater safety lay now in separating himself from the group and assuring himself complete isolation for the next twenty-four hours. He weighed the fact that he would be difficult to attack in the midst of the group against the other fact that he was spotted with complete accuracy if he remained with them.

But in the guise of bandits, for example, TB could have him separated without greatly risking intrusion. That risk they would be increasingly willing to take, he felt certain.

He spoke to Black William as they moved toward the horses for the day's ride.

"I've decided not to go with you," he said. He explained his reasoning.

"Then I'll go with you," said Black William. "Where you go, my sword follows until you are safe."

"I don't want you to abandon your pilgrimage."

"There are other Aprils and other pilgrimages. My obligation to you is forever. Where do we go?"

"I don't know. I just want to keep moving. But alone. Perhaps you know of a road along which we might spend the day with little chance of meeting travelers."

"We could take the north road leading out of town. It goes through a wooded section and is little used. It is actually a longer route to Canterbury. If we stayed on it, we would get there a couple of days later than the group."

"That's good enough. We'll drop behind by taking time with saddling and

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getting under way. When they're out of sight, we'll turn off."

HE WATCHED the others carefully as they mounted while he pretended difficulty with his saddle. Some of them nodded, others called a cheery come-on. One or two glanced with suspicious disdain at his ineptness. He spotted none who seemed likely to be TB Agents.

As the last of the party moved beyond the courtyard of the inn, Richard and William finally mounted. They moved slowly until the last of the pilgrims disappeared around a bend in the road.

Abruptly, they reined about and hastily retraced a quarter mile at a fast gallop. Then they turned off on the northern road and were in the wooded vale that Black William had described.

They rode for another ten minutes at a fast pace, and then subsided, and rode in silence for a long time.

The air was fresh with creation. Richard listened to the still, quiet sounds of the forest and watched the slowly shifting green and gray of the trees. The horses' feet made hypnotic sounds.

This would be a terrible day on which to die, he thought.

"Why do they want to kill you?" said Black William abruptly. "It's one thing I don't understand—in this land where all men are equal why do you have enemies determined to kill you? You have never told me."

Richard took a deep breath and looked long at his friend. "The land does not exist. It is a dream world where things are not real, but might be."

"You speak in riddles."

"I wonder if you can understand that I, too, came out of a dream world—a nightmare world that might vanish in flame at any moment?"

"I don't understand you."

"I have come out of the future, out of a world that will not exist for a thousand years. You cannot understand that, but it is so. Call it magic, call it dreams or what you will. It is something that is not real in this year of 1387. The only thing about it that is real is what I have written on the paper I gave you.

"The only thing that is ever real, that can be transferred from one generation to the next, is the ideas that men think. Man's body decays, his soul goes with the wind. But the ideas of his mind are planted in the minds of other men and never perish. Remember that, Black William."

Faintly, above the sounds of the forest, they were aware now of distant hoofbeats. They stopped a moment to listen, and Black William nodded.

"Riding fast," he said.

They could see but a short distance behind them because of the sharp turns in the road. On either side, the hills were too steep at this point to offer hiding off the road.

Black William spurred his horse. "Let's get on down the road to a turn-off where we can hide in the trees until they pass."

They gave the horses full head, and Richard clung with desperate awkwardness in his lack of riding skill. He was giving way to panic, he told himself. There was no reason to believe that the riders were pursuing Agents.

But he knew that they were. It was inevitable. He had supposed that they might attempt to ambush him from the side of the road if they discovered him riding this way. Always, they did the unexpected, as in this bold and noisy approach. He wondered how they would attack.

No break appeared in the hills as they rode, none that offered the haven they sought. And then the road straightened for a long distance ahead.

Black William pointed to a narrow ravine that seemed to break at one side of the road. "We'll have to try that! They'll have us spotted on this straight stretch."

Richard nodded and drew out the stasis projector. He switched on the instrument his father had brought.

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ABRUPTLY then, the pursuing hoofbeats grew louder. The two men turned to look. The riders were in sight now around the last curve. It was futile to attempt to turn off.

They were armed with crossbows. Richard breathed more easily. He judged that the two friars who had used a projector previously had been reprimanded for bringing such a weapon to this age. Regardless of the urgency of their chase, they were legally allowed no weapons but those of the culture they were in.

A bowman raised in the saddle as Richard watched. This was not serious. The arrow could not touch him if the instrument were reliable, and he had to believe that it was. They would not shoot at Black William, of course—

But the bowman was!

With a shock Richard realized the aim was not for him, but for his companion. He tried to bring the stasis projector to bear, while clinging awkwardly in the saddle.

It was far too late. There was a sudden squeal beside him. Black William was no longer there. He tumbled to the road and rolled in the dust as his horse went down with an arrow just ahead of its flank.

It was the last day, almost the last hour, in which the Agents had any chance of destroying him without intrusion, and they were risking anything that was necessary to reach their goal.

He should have stopped. But when the thought came he was a hundred meters beyond Black William. There was nothing to do but go on. These two, he could take care of by himself.

He tried again to level the projector, and cursed his awkwardness in the saddle. The Agents could score accuracy with a crossbow, and he could hardly sight a target long enough to fire!

Then he leveled and pressed the button.

But the Agent was a split second earlier. His arrow pierced the flank of the white horse and sent it rolling in the dust. Even as he pressed the button, Richard sensed a moment of flying helplessly through the air. And then the breath was knocked from his lungs as he slammed against the earth.

He lay for seconds, coughing and gasping for breath while the horsemen closed in. When he finally raised his head they were dismounting in a whirl of dust.

He grasped frantically for the projector that had fallen inches from his hand. The nearest bowman made a wild leap to jump on his arm as his fingers clutched the weapon and turned it upward. He pressed the button as the Agent was in midair. Fragments of the corpse dropped beside him as the sickening odor of burned flesh filled the air.

He struggled up. Dimly, he was aware that the other Agent was not coming at him but stood beside the horse, the crossbow raised.

"Drop it!" the Agent commanded.

Richard moved his arm. He felt the sudden sting of fire in his right wrist. In stupid disbelief, he saw the projector drop to the ground and a spurt of blood ooze around the arrow through his wrist.

The Agent rushed forward, his foot kicking the projector meters beyond them. He did not pursue it, but whirled again, the crossbow cocked once more.

"Quickly, now," he said with the rage of murder in his voice. "I'd kill you without a warning, but my orders are to give you every chance to return alive. One false move and this arrow will be through you."

In a kind of daze, Richard was still staring hypnotically at his wrist. Then his other hand sought the meter at his side. The fall from the horse had switched it off!

He threw the toggle again and glanced to the spot where the projector lay.

But unaccountably the Agent was laughing in derision. "You depend on *that* for protection and your life won't be worth a vapor in the wind!"

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"What do you mean?"

"I mean Time Bureau knew all about that little device. We let your father bring it to test whether he was lying or not when he promised to help you back. But we sabotaged the instrument first. The moment it was first turned on, the circuits automatically burned out."

The Agent was taunting him with a bitter laugh, his eyes blazing a challenge to Richard to rely on the instrument, to make a move.

Richard watched that face while the sun beat upon his own. He felt the sweat begin to roll, carrying the black dust in streaks down his face.

It was a trick, he thought. The Agent was faced with the final failure of his mission and he hoped to win by a trick. But what was the trick? He had not demanded that Richard turn off the device or hand it over. He had merely challenged him to move!

Then out of the corner of his eye he saw a movement down the road. Black William had somehow got his wounded animal to its feet again and was riding it toward them.

At the side of the road, only half as far from him as the Agent, Richard saw the protecting bulge of a boulder. At least, for a moment there would be protection, in case it were needed.

He leaped from his crouch. The arrow caught him full in the back.

XI

RIDING hard, and his head swimming with the pain of his own fall, Black William saw the arrow strike. With a great sob of rage he drew his dagger and stood in the stirrups. Fifty paces from the bowman he let it fly.

For an instant the bowman stood rigid, then slowly his fingers loosed the crossbow and let it fall. He bent, clutching at the knife handle projecting from his belly, then slowly crumpled.

Black William reined his crippled horse and dismounted quickly. His face had the flat expression of one rousing from a nightmare, not sure whether he yet faces reality or not.

He moved to the crumpled form of Richard, who had not moved. He knew before he touched him that there was no life in that body.

He thought of the things that Richard had been speaking only moments before. Out of a dream world of the future, his strange friend had said—and now he was gone—perhaps to that world of which he spoke. And Black William would never know the meaning of those final words of his mysterious friend.

He regarded Richard's slayers. He felt for them the contempt and bitterness he had felt for the paid and professional murderers he had found in every land. What kind of a dream world was it that held such as these?

There was great mystery here, and he knew that he would never be able to solve it.

Insects already buzzed at the pools of blood. He knelt over Richard's body as if to protect it from this final desecration. And then he remembered and drew out the paper that Richard had given him.

Slowly he began reading. It was difficult, for he was not a scholar and had only a cursory acquaintance with the arts of the learned. But slowly the message penetrated. It amplified the things that Richard had mentioned but briefly, and Black William began to understand the dream that the dead man had dreamed.

"I lied," he said softly. "I'm not going to give this paper to the poet, Richard.

"It's not a task for a poet. It's a task for a strong man who can preach not with words, but with deeds. Maybe I'm not strong enough, but you have given me a goal, Richard, and that has made me stronger than I ever was before.

"I'll deliver your message, strange friend, but not to the poet. I'll deliver it to all the world!"

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BACK in the conference room, Dr. Mortimer Sondermann cleared his throat and glanced about him.

"This Black William," he said, "is, of course, the great King William who displaced Richard II from the throne and brought the disastrous wars with France to a close.

"He is the same William who became the first great founder of the democratic ideal, who preached the doctrine of equality in an age when man was only climbing out of the slime of serfdom.

"He is the same Wiliam who has been regarded for almost a millenium as one of the foremost humanist philosophers who ever lived. It is very terrifying to contemplate what our own world might have been like if the life and ideals of Black William had been seriously disturbed by Richard Dawson's intrusion.

"Evidently our Agents were successful in preventing serious intrusion by Richard, otherwise our age would not have been what it is. We have seen complete peace for five hundred years, and there is reasonable assurance that we shall continue to see it for another time of equal extent."

"But what I don't understand," said McRae, "is the motive that led Richard Dawson to try an intrusion into the past of Black William. It is utterly senseless, the work of a madman!"

Sondermann shook his head. "It is beyond my understanding. Coleman admits, of course, that he helped Richard, but he claims no knowledge of the motives, and our tests show he's telling the truth.

"That is why I asked you to request Mrs. Dawson to be present."

"I tell you I don't know," Dorothy Dawson cried. "All I know is that my husband and my son are dead. And there was no purpose to their dying. I should think you should be the ones to tell me why they had to die. You killed Richard. You sent your murderers to kill him. And yet you do not know why."

"We know why," said Sondermann gently. "He had to die to keep from interfering with the great man he met. If he had lived he would undoubtedly have changed the objectives and goals of Black William. How extensively, we don't know. He might have kept Black William from perpetuating the democratic ideal in that particular age of history.

"If that had happened, it might have been delayed for five hundred years and we would now be fighting the great wars that ended five hundred years ago."

"But how do you know that what he did or would have done was bad?" she demanded harshly. "How do you know that his going didn't change the whole world for the better?"

The others about the table smiled indulgently at the woman. They ignored the faint things that huddled in the minds of all of them—the half-memories, now swiftly fading, of things that might have been and never were.

Sondermann said, "There is nothing in our science that will give us the answer to that question. We can never know exactly what the world might have been like if he had succeeded in his efforts to change the past—we can never know."

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With nightmares as weapons, Professor and Centaurian dueled for . . .

PARADOX PLANET

By ROGER DEE

I WAS a couple of hours out of Starport on Io with a cargo of *sulkha* bark in the *Annabelle's* hold when I picked up the first distress call. It was an autocall vocal, listing space-coordinates but not naming the emergency, and it signed off every round with the name of Matthew Pringle—a name which, at the time, meant a little less than nothing to me.

I flipped on my answer-beam.

"*Annabelle* calling," I said into my panel mike. "Eighty-foot space tug, William X. Bailey owner and operator. I'm

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an asteroid prospector with a full hull and a limited lift, but I'll do what I can. *Annabelle* coming in."

It happens I'm better known across the asteroid belt as "Blaster Bill" Bailey than as William X., but I gave it to him as per space operator's license because this Pringle *homo* sounded more like a professor than a spaceburner, and the chances were he'd never heard of me.

I hated to cut my orbit just then because I was looking forward to the *skohl* jag that was waiting for me when I hit Mars with my cargo; but I couldn't ignore a d.c. in the A-belt. No chunk-hopper can afford to pass one up, because he never knows when he'll be flashing one himself. So I located the asteroid radiating the autocall and swung the *Annabelle* off course, plotting a stable orbit four miles out to prevent upsetting the chunk's screwball trajectory. Then I broke out my life-shell and headed in.

This asteroid was nothing special, just another odd-angled button of nickel-rock and quartz floating around with a zillion or so others, too small even to rate a number on the astro-charts.

Then I spotted the first wrecked ship, and business began to pick up.

She was a long, spindle-shaped job, matching the *Annabelle's* length, and she had crashed hard enough to crimp every plate in her hull. Her shape gave me my first hint of danger, because I'm familiar wtih every type of spacecraft afloat, and I had never heard of one built along those lines. She seemed totally unfamiliar.

She wasn't a Solarian craft.

THE digging-machine off to her right wasn't a Solarian job either, because it stood on a double fringe of jointed metal legs instead of on caterpillar-treads. It looked like a black metal centipede, busily boring a vertical shaft into the asteroid and bringing up a steady stream of white metal ore on a conveyor belt.

I was still coming in fast when I saw the second wreck, half a mile from the first and nearly hidden by the steep horizon of the chunk. It was an ordinary Earth-built job, and it was cracked up like a crate of eggs.

I caught a flash of motion near the first wreck then, and got a nasty jolt. The pilot of the spindle-ship scuttled into sight, and I could see at a glance that he really *wasn't* a Solarian—none of Sol's children ever spawned a brute like that! He—or it—looked like nothing more than a ten-foot lizard covered with shaggy, bottle-green hair that stood out behind it as it streaked across the rock on six scaly legs and vanished into the spindle-ship. I got only a glimpse, but I could have sworn that the unlikely beast had two heads, one at each end.

I had yanked back the life-shell's decelerator, slowing down for a better look, and now I got my second shock.

The lifeboat smashed headlong into some sort of invisible force-field. I felt a sharp, grating wrench in my bones, and the face of the asteroid melted and changed under me like a sudden scene-shift in a telemovie space-opera.

It wasn't an odd-angled floating rock any more. It was a round, smooth little planet with a gravity approaching Earth's, and it looked like a green apple dipped into gray paint.

Two-thirds of its surface was covered with a gray jungle of stocky, alien trees and fleshy vines that crawled like snakes. The robot-digger dumped its powdered white ore on them, and they crawled out from under again as fast as they were buried.

Even the air about my life-shell was gray, swirling mistily like a thin, poisonous fog. Through it I glimpsed the end of the crawling jungle, where a beach of drab gray sand undulated down to a miniature ocean. I almost forgot about the alienness of the forest when I saw that ocean, because it was on the other side of the boundary, and it belonged to a different world.

The water was a fresh, clear green that lapped gently on the beach, and the

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sky curving over it was a serene, cloudless blue. There was a big grassy island in the distance, with a low knoll visible above a beach of white sand. Back of the knoll a sparkling fountain played under spreading, wide-branched trees. Still farther back a big rustic house of white stone sprawled comfortably against the horizon, and beside it lay the wreck of the Earth ship I had seen.

I got all this at a glimpse, and that brief second of bug-eyed staring was almost the death of me. Something hit my life-shell from above like a runaway comet, spinning me end over end, and plummeted past so fast I had only a dizzy glimpse of it.

One look was plenty. It was a big scaly flying-lizard with leathery, forty-foot wings and a barbed tail, and it was still gnashing a fanged cavern of mouth that could have swallowed me, life-shell and all, like a pink capsule.

I FOUGHT the controls like a maniac, trying to stop my spinning before the big flapper—I never knew what else to call it—could turn and come at me again. And in one of my upside-down gyrations I caught a glimpse of a whole cloud of the scaly brutes rising out of the jungle below, so many of them they looked like a swarm of monstrous, toothy bees.

The first one pulled a flapping Immelmann and came in again before I got the lifeboat under control. For a moment the forward port was blanked out under his booming wings—then my jets took hold and I tore away like a Jovian cave-bat in mating season.

The swarm dropped behind, giving me another look at the pilot-lizard as he charged out of his ship to stare after me. He had two heads, all right, and neither of them was happy. Then I was rocketing across the gray sand dunes and over the ocean, and the flappers dropped the chase at the water's edge and fell back into their crawly jungle.

I throttled down as I reached the island, floating to a stop above the grassy knoll I had seen. The island was like a well-kept Earth estate, a little paradise of close-cropped green grass and cool shade trees, nestling like a little jewel under a sky as smooth as an inverted blue bowl. I slid open my exit port and sniffed the air.

It was Earth air, clean and fresh and fragrant with the smell of many growing things.

With the opening of the port I heard music floating up, a mellow baritone voice leading what sounded like a small symphony orchestra. For a minute or two I thought I had gone ether-happy at last, because the words were English and the tune was as old and familiar as space itself.

It was Brahms' Lullaby.

I shut my eyes and counted to ten before I rolled the life-shell on its side and looked down. The music came from what looked like a big green barrel-cactus growing at the top of the knoll, a bulbous green thing with a pulsing sac on either side that puffed in and out alternately like opposing lungs. A single stubby tentacle waved like a baton, and the barrel itself was freckled all over with singing mouths.

I hung there for a while and watched, and when it kept on singing I finally decided I wasn't space-nutty after all. I had seen some unlikely sights since I started rock-hopping, and this monstrosity was probably natural enough in its own screwball way.

It didn't seem dangerous, anyway, so I rolled upright and looked around. The sparkle of the fountain to the right of the rustic stone house caught my eye, and I eased the life-shell toward it. The fountain rose three or four feet and trickled into a little swale to form a clear, shallow pool ringed about with spreading trees that couldn't have been anything but elms.

It was too inviting to resist—I was cramped in the life-shell, and I hadn't had a bath since I left Mars two months ago. I landed beside the pool and stripped off my grimy coveralls, took another look around and waded out into

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the coolly green, shadowed pool.

I felt like a new *homo* when I waded out again and lay down under one of the elms, relaxing with my fingers laced together under my head. The breeze from the miniature ocean was fresh and cool, and the grass under me smelled just the way it used to smell when I was a kid playing hooky from school back on Earth.

The musical barrel by the beach struck up another soothing chorus of the *Lullaby*. I lay there, relaxing while I listened, and before I knew it I was asleep—I think.

I DREAMED an outlandish dream, a regular *skohl* addict's nightmare.

I was dressed in a skin-tight version of the tunic-and-boots uniform you see in the telemovie space thrillers, and besides the familiar Quantrell blast gun at my belt I was armed with a long, gleaming sword, the kind the ancients used for fighting duels. I made a great picture—you know how you seem to *see* yourself in dreams, as if you are both actor and spectator—all rippling with muscles and crouched in a grim fighting stance.

That was only the opening scene. From then on I was as busy as a geiger counter in a plutonium mine.

I was facing six big hairy apes with slanting yellow eyes and—this was a dream, remember—four six-fingered hands each, the nails of every finger manicured to a high polish. These brutes were creeping toward me, and I was waving my sword in their faces to hold them back.

I didn't have to look down to know that I was defending a long-legged blonde who wore only the tattered remains of what had been a brief ensemble to begin with. She lay on the grass at my feet, propped on one round elbow, looking worshipfully up at me with big violet eyes that would have made a paralyzed octogenarian smash his wheelchair.

I didn't have time to wonder how I got into such a spot, nor why I didn't use the Quantrell gun at my belt. This last was proof enough that I was dreaming, because the old reliable Q-gun is as much a part of me as my right hand. As a matter of fact, my handiness with it is responsible for the "Blaster Bill" tag hung on me in a hundred brawling spaceports.

The nearest ape charged then, beating his chest and snarling. I took a swing at him, woke up and opened my eyes—and nearly passed out from shock.

Because opening my eyes didn't change the scene a whit.

I was staring into the slanted yellow eyes of this hairy monstrosity, and his shiny-nailed hands were reaching for my neck. It was like a telemovie closeup, except that this was for keeps with no holds barred. I could feel his breath blowing hot on my face, and see the shine of teeth that could have snapped an arm off me.

By luck, he didn't reach me. The swing I had started before I woke up got him first, and he went down kicking.

I really *was* swinging that shiny sword. I shot a glance downward, and the only familiar item of this juvenile space-opera rig I was wearing was the good old Quantrell blaster at my hip. Its being there saved my life, because just then the other apes rushed me.

I dropped the sword and yanked out the Q-gun, stepping back to get raying room. My foot struck something soft that squealed, and I tripped backward across this same luscious blonde I had dreamed of. She stared at me with wide violet eyes when I landed beside her, her dewy red lips parted in the beginning of a scream.

I remember thinking: *This is where I came in. Now I'll really wake up.* But I couldn't forget the feel of that first brute's breath on my face, and I could see the nearest of the remaining five reaching out a hairy hand toward the blonde's foot. It was real!

Somehow I shook off my trance and tripped the release on the Quantrell. The sizzling orange beam took the stooping

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ape in the middle and scattered him over several square yards of grass. I got a second and third with two quick blasts, but the two that were left were too close by then to risk another shot.

They piled on me like two hairy nightmares, burying me under half a ton of writhing bodies. The Q-gun was yanked out of my hand, and two separate sets of manicured nails dug into my neck.

Everything was going black when I heard a shrill, whistling scream and a thunder of wings overhead. I thought of the gray flappers and wondered vaguely if they had found a way through the ocean boundary after all—as if it mattered, with those hairy hands sunk deep into my windpipe!

Then an old man's voice sounded over the wing-beats, and I recognized it as the one that had recorded the distress calls. I couldn't make out the words, but all at once the apes were gone—whiff, just like that—and I was sitting up and shaking the fog out of my brain.

The blonde did a neat roll and snuggled against me, her cool white arms tight around my neck. I got a fuzzy, too-near glimpse of violet eyes, and the perfume of her hair made me dizzy. She squeezed hard enough to shut off my wind, and her lips brushed my ear like a high-voltage wire.

"Willie, darling," she squealed, half deafening me. "You did it—you *rescued* me!"

That was when I got my eyes uncrossed and saw the old man on the hippogryph.

HE WAS short and plump, with a fringe of wispy white hair around a smooth pink scalp and another fringe of wispy white whiskers around a smooth pink face. The name of Matthew Pringle fit him like a glove.

He was boiling mad.

"Why didn't you come to my ship at once," he yelled down at me, "instead of dawdling out here?"

I didn't answer, being too busy staring at the hippogryph. Not that I knew what it was—Pringle explained that later. It was like an eagle in front, with snowy wings that must have spanned forty feet, and it had a set of foreclaws that would have punctured the hide of a Venusian crocodile. Behind the wings it switched families and turned into a horse, hoofs, tail and all.

My staring didn't make Pringle any happier.

"Irresponsible fool!" he howled. "You might have been killed, psyching monsters like those apes!"

On top of being called "Willie" by the blonde, it was too much. I got sore, too.

"What do you mean, psyching?" I barked. "Why, you fuzz-faced old maniac—"

I got up, and the blonde, still clinging to my neck, got up with me. She was a foot shorter than I was, which made her feet swing clear of the ground, but she didn't let go. I put an arm around her to ease her back to the sod, and promptly forgot about Pringle until he let out a yowl in a different tone of voice.

"They're coming faster!" he bleated, scared stiff. I whirled to see what was coming, and wondered if I was dreaming again.

The gray sand dunes from the jungle side of the asteroid were creeping slowly across the miniature ocean toward our island. What had been a quarter-mile of open water was now less than a hundred yards, and the distance was lessening visibly.

"Too late," Pringle groaned. He wrung his hands, and his round stomach shook. "Nothing can stop them now. Our only hope is to get away quickly, before we are cut off."

He cut me off short when I opened my mouth. "I'll give you details later. Climb up behind me, quickly!"

I looked over the advancing dunes and saw a horde of the scaly flappers waddling ahead of their crawling jungle, beating their wings for balance and snapping rock-crusher jaws. I didn't want another brush with them, but I didn't like the look of the hippogryph

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much better than I did them.

"We'll follow you in the life-shell," I compromised.

Pringle took off with a great thunder of wings, and the girl and I crawled into the lifeboat. The trip took only a couple of minutes, but in that time I learned enough to make me dizzy.

The blonde's name was Llona. She knew all about me, but her information was strictly cockeyed—it matched the space-opera rig I woke up in, and she had a crush on me that just didn't make sense. I practically had to pry the wench loose from my neck when we landed beside Pringle's white stone house.

He led us inside, passing up the wrecked ship, and I whistled when I saw the luxury this *homo* lived in. The parquet floors were polished to mirror brightness, and his tapestries and paintings would have been worth their weight in plutonium on Earth. A crew of dusky little servants scampered through, dusting and polishing, as we came in.

Pringle sat us down on a cloud-soft couch and trotted over to look out an open window at the creeping sand dunes.

"I can't understand it," he groaned. "I kept the balance even until yesterday in spite of that cursed Centaurian, but his field is growing so rapidly now that—"

"It would help," I said, "if we knew what you're raving about. Calm down and give us the dope, before you blow a jet."

He threw a last despairing look at the narrowing strip of water and sat down, wringing his plump hands. He gave me the story from beginning to end, explaining everything—and brother, it was a lulu!

MATTHEW PRINGLE had been a professor of extra-terrestrial psychology at an Earth University, and was on a sabbatical to Callisto when his astroplotter went haywire and cracked him up on this little asteroid. He had expected to smother instantly on the airless chunk when the crash breached his hull, but instead he found himself in the center of a patch of green grass and a bubble of fresh air—the two things he wanted most desperately to see at the moment.

"The core of this asteroid," he explained, "is a comparatively small mass of some alien metal originating outside our solar system, perhaps outside our space and time. It has no place in our periodic table, but it does have the unique property of materializing as solid bodies the mental projections of an intelligent brain. I named it *psychium* on that account. I created my estate out of nothing, so to speak, as well as the servants and Astolpho—my hippogryph—and Toby, the singer you saw on the knoll by the beach. And when I had made a perfect world I had no further desire to return to Earth, because here I have infinitely more than a poor professor could hope for anywhere else in our system."

But then the Alpha Centaurian had shown up. He had drifted in a cosmic derelict who had wandered clear out of his own system. Pringle tried to give him a hand, but the lizard-man guessed the possibilities of *psychium* as quickly as the Earthman had, and set up an environment to suit his own alien taste. His poisonous atmosphere and his first gray flappers had almost been the death of Pringle before he got clear.

Later, as the Centaurian got the feel of the thing, he took over an entire hemisphere and duplicated his own world.

"Our spheres of influence were even at first," Pringle said, "because we are equal as to will and intelligence. But early this morning his zone began to expand, and has grown so rapidly—"

I quit listening here, because I was beginning to understand what had happened back there at the fountain. I had dreamed of six impossible apes, and *whango*—there they were, until Pringle came along and dematerialized them in the nick of time.

It was almost funny until I realized that I must have dreamed up Llona, too.

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It seemed impossible, somehow. I looked at her sitting close beside me on the couch, watching my every move and waiting for another chance to grab me by the neck.

I felt guilty about Llona. No wonder she had a crush on me—she saw me as I saw myself, far down in the depths of my subconscious ego, a swashbuckling telemovie hero! It was a dirty trick to play on the poor kid, because she couldn't help being nuts about me. And how could I go overboard in return for an illusion, for a girl who didn't really exist?

Pringle sneaked another look out the window and came back cracking his knuckles.

"Nothing is left but flight," he groaned. "We can still escape in your lifeboat, I think. But the pity of it, to lose my perfect, lovely little world!"

I knew why he was losing it, and said so.

"This Centaurian is drilling a shaft to the *psychium* at the center of the asteroid," I said. "He's hauling it up to his own side, and his influence grows as the stuff accumulates."

"Of course, it's the old law of inverse squares!" Pringle said, seeing the point at once. "But it's too late to start a shaft of my own. The dunes would cover us long before I brought up enough *psychium* to offset the advantage that devil has gained."

I put my chin in my hands, brushing off an attempt of Llona's to sit on my lap, and thought—hard. This floating rock was the answer to a space-prospector's prayer, a cosmic Big Rock Candy Mountain where a man's whim was law and the sky was the limit. With a setup like this I could quit grubbing in the slimy Ionian jungles for *sulkha* bark. I could sit back and laugh at other fools who froze their posteriors in frosted spacesuits while they dug fool's opals out of a dead planet's bones.

I could have girls like Llona by the dozen. I could have baked Venusian shellfish three times a day, and yellow *skohl* by the barrel.

There was one catch, of course. I had to stop that homicidal Centaurian before he drove us all into space again.

"Look," I said finally. "You've been trying to out-concentrate this shaggy lizard. Has it occurred to you to do something practical, such as blowing him up?"

IT HADN'T occurred to Pringle. His whisker-fringed jaw dropped as the idea percolated through his intellectual skull, and his round eyes sparkled briefly.

"I could materialize explosives, but they would not pass the Centaurian's boundary," he said then. "My creations could not exist in his zone, just as his pterodactyls could not exist in mine."

"I've got an eighty-foot space tug anchored four miles out," I told him. "It's armed with a fixed battery of Quantrell rays that can wipe out an army like His Unlikeliness."

Pringle tried to hug me, but Llona beat him to it.

"Of course," Pringle shouted. "You can—but you'll have to hurry—" He shot a look outside and his face went gray.

"*Toby!*" he whispered. "They've got poor Toby already!"

I went over and looked out, and he was right. The gray dunes had reached our beach and buried the knoll, and the singing cactus was gone. I missed the smooth strains of Toby's *Lullaby*, and the thought of that pleasant brute being smothered under crawling sand burned me up.

"It's too quiet," I said. "Didn't he ever sing anything else?"

Pringle looked at me like a kid with a dead puppy.

"The *Lullaby* was the only song I ever liked," he said defensively. "How could he sing anything else?"

"Look," I growled, making up my mind. "You hang on here and try to keep this stuff back. I'll bring down the *Annabelle* and put a blast-beam on that lousy lizard that will curl his hide

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like a bacon rind!"

Llona ran after me, her big violet eyes brimming with tears.

"Don't leave me behind, Willie," she begged. "Take me with you! *Please,* Willie—"

"Get back in there and shut up!" I snarled at her.

My ears were still burning when I spun the life-shell off the grass and aimed it toward the swinging silver dot in space that was the *Annabelle.* The last *homo* to call me "Willie" is buried under a cairn of tungsten rocks on Ganymede, and the one before that—well, I just don't like being called Willie. Not even by a cute blonde dish like Llona.

I didn't stay sore long, though, because the life-shell took all my attention. Getting off the asteroid was harder than getting on it.

Pringle's green area had contracted to a hundred-yard circle, and was shrinking fast. I couldn't blast off vertically unless I took a dogleg trajectory and lost valuable time correcting my course, so I slanted up at a steep angle that brought me into the Centaurian's upper field before I was a hundred yards off the ground.

He must have been waiting for me, because the swirling gray fog he used for air was full of flappers before I got set. Their scaly bodies threshed around me, slamming the life-shell about like a chip in a whirlpool. I was dizzy in seconds.

A scaly monster flashed past my forward port and I found myself staring, upside down, into a mouth like a cavern full of drooling stalactites. I pulled back on the decelerator instinctively and the ravening blue blast of the emergency jets kicked me away from the brute with a snap that nearly broke my neck.

The lifeboat shot backward, caromed off the wings of another flapper, and hung for a brief instant above the maelstrom. In that instant I touched off the rear jets and shot up like a bullet, accelerating at a rate that sprung my knees and whisked me out of danger in a second.

I looked down and felt a cold spot grow in my stomach when I saw how small Pringle's circle was. The gray dunes had covered the fountain and the elms now, and the house wouldn't last long.

I got another shock then, a jolt that nearly made me overshoot the Annabelle and slam straight into space.

I felt that sudden grating wrench in my bones again, and the scene below faded out like a televisor image when the switch is cut. There was no more friendly green circle, no more rambling house against the horizon, no crawling jungle and sand dunes. Nothing was left but a bleak rock holding two wrecked ships.

I could see the Centaurian lizard shuttling back and forth between his robot digger and his spindle-ship, and I could see Matthew Pringle sitting wearily on the ground beside his own smashed ether boat. There was no sign of Llona or of the little brown servants or the Centaurian's flappers.

It's all an illusion, I thought, remembering the *psychium. What's the use of trying to save it?*

Then the Annabelle swung up before me, and I dropped that line of thought. I could settle that problem later, after I had wiped out that murderous two-headed lizard.

I SLAMMED the entrance lock behind me and swung the *Annabelle* straight for the asteroid. A minute later I was braking to a halt above the Centaurian ship, hovering just outside that bone-wrenching field of force. I grinned tightly as I punched the button controlling the big twin Quantrell beams, expecting to see the spindle-ship whiffed away like a wisp of cotton fluff.

It didn't whiff.

The Quantrell beams tore at the outer rim of the force field and bounced off in a blinding shower of orange sparks. For some reason—Pringle tried later to

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explain something about mismatched space continua being warped into hyperspace by the *psychium* effect, but I didn't get it—the Quantrell rays wouldn't penetrate that shield. All I knew was that I'd have to get down inside that gray fog again if I meant to reach the Centaurian in time.

I kicked on the jets and shot down toward the spindle-ship, wincing at the familiar bone-wrench as I entered the *psychium* field.

Instantly the fog was full of flappers. I felt the ship lurch under the impact of heavy bodies, and heard the stony grating of their teeth on her silvered sides. I thumbed the Quantrells desperately, and drew a great sigh of relief when the sultry orange rays cleared a smoking tunnel through the melee. After that I ignored the flappers and bored straight at the spindle-ship, the Quantrells stabbing ahead like two deadly, spark-shot searchlight beams.

The Centaurian scuttled down from his pile of *psychium* ore, where he had been crouching to get the maximum effect of its nearness. I grinned again as the ray sped along the ground toward him, getting a great kick out of the knowledge that in another couple of seconds I'd be rid of him for keeps. When those smoking Quantrell beams caught up with him—

I couldn't believe it had happened until I heard the hiss and crackle behind my control panel as the main power condenser of my ray generator burned out from overloading.

The Quantrell beams flickered and quit cold.

It was too late to turn back. The gray flappers were dropping after me like a flight of scaly, leather-winged bats, racing to be in at the death. I'd never get through that deadly cloud without the Quantrells to clear the way.

I slammed the *Annabelle* down as she went, landing squarely in the center of that pile of *psychium*—and at the instant of impact my one chance of winning leaped into my mind. The Centaurian caught the angle at the same time and popped out of his ship like a six-legged weasel, racing to reach the *psychium* again before I could manage to get set.

The Centaurian had won over Pringle because he was nearer to that pile of dream stuff — and there I was, sitting right on top of it!

I set my teeth and thought about green grass and good oxy-nitrogen air. I thought about acres of grass and enough cubic volume of Earth atmosphere to cover a planet, concentrating until the cold sweat of strain stood out on my face like frost-beads on a pitcher of chilled *skohl*. And I got results, slowly at first because I was new to this materialization game, but results just the same.

A fifty-foot circle of impossibly green grass sprang up around the *Annabelle*, and I heard the *whoosh* of Earth air replacing the gray fog. The flappers caught inside the circle vanished like the toothy nightmares they were, and the Centaurian himself skidded to a stop barely in time.

I concentrated harder, and the circle widened, forcing the Centaurian back. It wasn't my thought-field that threatened him—it was the oxygen in my air, which was as deadly to him as the vacuum of space would have been. He crept back slowly, fighting for every inch, both snouted faces snarling in desperation. And the farther he went from the *psychium* pile the faster my own thought-field grew.

The struggle lasted for perhaps thirty seconds before he broke and ran for his life, my swiftly-growing circle of green racing at his heels. I saw another green area growing out from Pringle's island, and knew that Pringle was taking advantage of the break to regain his lost ground.

When the two circles met it was all over. The gray jungle with its flappers and its crawling vines melted away, and the Centaurian tumbled in a shaggy heap and kicked his last.

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I LANDED in front of Pringle's house a few minutes later, and got a hero's welcome. Pringle was out with a brass band of little brown men, but Llona outran the lot of them. She wrapped her cool white arms around my neck, half strangling me, and planted a kiss on my cheek that nearly took the skin off.

"Willie, you *darling!*" she squealed. "You big, brave—"

I didn't hit her, but it took every ounce of control I had.

Later, when I could shake Llona, I took Matthew Pringle aside and told him I wouldn't be staying on Paradox Planet with him, and why. I just couldn't stomach the idea of living in an out-and-out dream world, no matter how perfect it was.

That jolt I got when I went up after the *Annabelle* had taught me what our little paradise actually was.

"The solar system is a pretty rough place for a lone-wolf prospector," I admitted. "But I'm a hard-headed *homo*. I like my risks and my women real."

Pringle argued himself blue in the face, but it didn't help.

"If it's Llona you're worried about," he said, "that is a simple matter. We can dematerialize her and—"

"You're a fat liar," I said. "You couldn't do it, and neither could I. It would be murder. She's a sweet kid, and none of this is her fault. She's going to get her break."

When Pringle finally gave in I stood by, feeling like a man at his own funeral, while he went into his trance and materialized a duplicate Bill Bailey. A duplicate who wore the same silly space-opera rig I had dreamed up by the fountain, and who came into existence with one fixed compulsion—to stick on Paradox Planet and give Llona back squeeze for squeeze until she yelled quits or until they choked each other to death. I figured I owed that much to Llona.

This facsimile Bailey settled his wide sword-belt rakishly about his lean waist and curled his lip at me.

"Sucker!" he jeered. "Go back to your stinking *sulkha* jungles and space-port flophouses, and see who gives a damn!"

He was dashing off to find Llona when I shook hands with Pringle and walked back to the *Annabelle* through the soft purple twilight that marked the end of my first and last day on Paradox Planet. A twilight made drowsy and peaceful by the muted singing of a recreated Toby, orchestrating his inevitable *Lullaby*.

I eased the *Annabelle* into space quietly so Llona wouldn't hear me go, and I felt almost homesick until I passed out of the *psychium* field and the little green world blanked out to cold, bare rock again.

I felt better after that. I felt better still when I thought of a little redheaded dancer I knew in Aeropolis, on Mars. Her eyes were green instead of violet and she was a far cry from Llona's clinging type. But she was plenty real, and she knew better than to call me "Willie Darling."

And looking about at the deep velvet black of space with its flaming suns and its wild, unexplored worlds wiped away my last trace of regret. Because this was the real thing, and there's always an adventure waiting somewhere for the restless *homo* who is willing to go out and look for it. . .

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

adaptation and adjustment don't work . . . *can't* work. It's not just the increasing complexity of civilized life, not just a quantitative change; it's a basic change in the *kind* of physical facts we have to adjust to.

The direction of scientific work has been clear to see for some years now. Its progress was inevitable; yet somehow, very few of us saw it. From physics and chemistry to biochemistry and medicine; and now from the human body to the human mind and society.

How many times have you heard it in the past? "You can't change human nature." How many times did you nod sagely, and agree?

Try it on for size right now. Consider the statement, and think back to when you heard it last, and what effect it had on you. Think of it now, in terms of the past ten years of work in endocrinology; think of it in terms of a propaganda machine like Goebbels'. Think of the experimental education projects that raised the I.Q. ratings of children by as much as 20 points, simply by removing them to a more favorable environment.

Is it "changing human nature" to turn a homosexual into a fully functioning male, by giving him hormone shots? Is it "changing human nature" to raise children who can turn in friends and relatives for execution or the concentration camp, without so much as a quiver of hesitation? Or, by the simple addition of vitamins and affection, to raise other children as voluntary readers of books, when without interference they would have remained on the comic-level through "mature" life?

It certainly is.

Only the Beginning

And these things were only the small beginnings. Science fiction today is increasingly exciting, and as a by-product, increasingly good fiction, because the authors are doing their speculating now in the field of human behavior. And, as happened twenty years ago, the researchers in the field are doing parallel work.

The social sciences are infinitely more difficult for human beings to work with than was "natural" science, and for obvious reasons. We face the same problems here that astronomers had to conquer before they could distinguish between Earth's own atmospheric effects and what was coming in from outside. It takes years of slow steady accumulation of data, by many men with many varied views, before it is possible to make a valid statement about the meaning of the Doppler effect. It takes even more years, and a great many more points of view, to sort out the real and apparent meanings behind any investigator's findings on the subject of his fellow-creatures.

Philosophy, history, theology, government, and the fine arts: for centuries these were the accepted spheres of activity for those who were curious about the activities of man. A long list of keen minds behind famous names were accumulating data over the years.

The intellectual revolution that came with the industrial revolution stimulated a new kind of thinking on the subject: an attempt to formulate, to classify, to find natural laws that would apply as readily to human behavior as the laws of physics and chemistry seemed to apply to the world around us. Economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology: they all called themselves sciences, and the workers in these fields made ardent efforts to behave like scientists.

Human Engineering

Enough data was accumulated to make an engineering approach possible. Just as skyscrapers could be built on a foundation of 19th century physics, without any understanding of nuclear reactions or electromagnetic properties —so the 19th century social "scientists" laid the theoretical groundwork on which 20th century "human engineering" arose. Advertising, propaganda, social work, personnel management, housing developments, public works projects, shock therapy, and hundreds of others, too numerous too mention . . . all these endeavored (sometimes with startling success) to apply what had been learned to living human beings, one by one, and two by two, in family groups and in cities and in nations as a whole.

And all the while, researchers were at work along new lines of investigation . . . the while the "engineers," true to type, collected more data from every encounter with reality.

Men built giant brains, and found the complex machines had distinct parallels with human minds: cybernetics. Men studied the use of language, and the differences in communicative

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effect of words and mathematical symbols: general semantics and symbolic logic. Men isolated chemical fluids and determined the nature of gland secretions, and their relation to human reactions; others spent hours with playing cards and a pair of dice, and evaluated the human capacity for extra-sensory perception, for telepathy, for telekinesis. From the laboratories of the physical scientists in every field, information came pouring out; and statisticians began correlating some of what had been learned.

We have, by now, acquired a little knowledge; we know there are definite ascertainable correlations between physique, diet, posture, hormones, oxygen intake, atmospheric pressure, sunspots, supersonic vibrations, and the human "mind." We know that by changing one or all of these factors—where we have acquired techniques for changing them—we can effect a change in the minds of one or more persons. And these are only a few of the factors, chosen at random.

Creating a Mind

In short, we know enough at last to be able to formulate workable hypotheses of how to *create a new kind of mind* in an individual. We have approached the functional level of synthesis, and are on the verge of acquiring an operative social *science*.

Where will it come from? Who is the still-unknown Einstein of the field? The quietly-laboring Curie? The Bohr? The Meitner? The Oppenheimer?

Nobody knows, yet. But it is much easier to spot the method; once again the answer is *synthesis*.

There are literally dozens of schools of psycho-therapy, and all of them have produced cures, or given aid to troubled people. None have worked for all who tried. Each has something to offer; there is proven value in any school of psychiatry that has has gained any following, however small.

Mind and Body

Then perhaps a generally applicable approach to emotional adjustments can be arrived at by examining all the techniques of the various schools? That much is elementary; too elementary, because it is still working with what is at hand. We want a theory that will enable us to create, as well as modify. All right; try incorporating what we've learned about the body-mind relationships. There is the vast unsorted pile of information about the effects of physical environment and body changes on mental ability and emotional stability. There is also a rapidly growing practice in psychosomatic medicine: the effects *the mind* can have *on the body*. Clearly an *inter*-relationship exists, so we must study both together. Is there a clue to the nature of the relationship in cybernetics? I'd guess there is. And when you work these and a dozen others scraps of information together, what is the best way to communicate the new knowledge? Take a stab at general semantics; there might be something there. Or can we do better with direct extra-sensory communication?

I am certain that, right now, groups of people are at work on this synthesis in dozens of different places. I know of one such group in New York, working with a basic perspective derived from Gestalt psychology, with a technique designed to develop self-awareness in the individual, primarily by sharpening his perceptions and interpretations of his own body sensations. The group has borrowed liberally from the work of cults and "crackpots" as well as from orthodox psychiatry; they're getting exciting results.

In the same city, a dancing teacher is giving a course in "body reorientation," and using almost identical techniques of increasing self-awareness. Alcoholics Anonymous, I'm told, has developed similar techniques for its members. The Grantly Dick Read " natural childbirth" exercises are startlingly similar to those prescribed by the dancing teacher for tired business people. The natural childbirth philosophy rests on the individual's ability to identify internal body sensations: to distinguish pain from pressure. And, just a few days ago, I was taken as a guest to a demonstration of "supra-sensory perception" by a researcher in the field who not only possesses the ability himself, but is preparing to conduct a class in it; he is convinced that e.s.p. is *not* a special gift, but an innate skill that anyone can develop with proper training.

You guessed it; the training starts with the exercise of techniques designed to increase the individual's perceptions of sensation on the body level!

Thus, in my own personal experience, I see a point of contact being approached by such divergent individuals as these: a psychic researcher, a University professor of psychiatry, and a bunch of drunks; a moralizing physician, a Greenwich Village philosopher-and-poet, and

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a hard-headed endocrinologist; a dancing teacher . . . and a science fiction writer, namely *me*.

Is it the only approach? Almost certainly, not. It is the one that has caught my imagination, the one I've noticed. And, because so many lines of thinking have led to it, it is almost certainly, *one* of the methods that will work. It is synthesis in action . . . the kind of synthesis that will enable us, eventually, to acquire a science that *can change human nature* . . . and will know what it's doing while it does it.

—*Judith Merrill.*

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

THE letters which flood this office every month convince us as nothing else could, how remarkably international in character is the fan movement. This could some day throw some weight towards a better understanding between the people of different nations, a consummation devoutly to be wished.

CARFU
by Dick Clarkson

Dear Sam: I've digested the new covers and the new format. Up until now, I've carefully refrained from making comments on your new set-up. But I might as well go on record as saying that it is far better than the old one. The whole style has changed radically; and now that I've had a chance to see if the novelty wears off (two ishes of SS and thish of TWS), I've decided that the novelty won't wear off. . . . it's quite permanent. Well done, me bhoy.

Seems like you've been getting a flood of letters from the female contingent recently, all complaining that the femmes are revealed with us males in the background. They say that it ain't fair; I agree. Not only for their end of the argument—that's really a minor point. I figure it so: Here we are, the allegedly stronger sex, giving the foreground and, in fact, three-quarters of each cover illo to the female girls of the opposite sex. Now, Sam, we just gotta keep face. What if fandom should suddenly turn up with some woman radical like Carrie Nation or Carrie Chapman Catt? Why, we'd have a full-scale war on our hands, and they'd never give us the chance to take the gals off the covers! No, sir! We'd better get us up to an equal footing with them while they're pleading us to.

Interior illos: not up to par. Finlay, as usual, was tops. Orban did some good stuff, but he's done better. I see a new name. Poulton? He's okay. Keep him. But I'm not going to form an opinion on one illo.

I see Seibel is still with us. What you ought to do to fool that boy is write a cruddy story, read it, groan, and mail a rejection slip to yourself. That'll quell his idea that you sell yourself stories. Ah! . . . I have it! Title his next letter "SNAFU Seibel". Unless he's already thought it up. Come to think of it, that's a darn good title! How about the title for this one as "CARFU Clarkson" or something? Just as SNAFU stands for "Situation Normal: All Fouled Up", CARFU (a product, 100% original, of my own alleged mind) would be for "Conditions Are Really Fouled Up". A good way to get people to read the letters: use some fool word they've never seen before. They'll read it to find out what it is. Wunnerful thing, curiosity.

Think I'll shut up now. I seldom do favors for people unless the favor involved is easy to do. I'm a lazy guy. So when you asked for short letters, it was okay by me. Less bother and work involved. Wonder what's a good way to end a letter? All the regular words are so. . . . well, trite. Hmmm. Eureka! I have it! Credit goes to Bill Venable for this sublime word. How about "framp"?—*410 Kensington Rd., Baltimore 29, Md.*

Dunno who said it first, but "framp" is right out of Pogo Possum. Didn't you happen to see Pogo's version of Cinderella? The King's Heralds come to the door and as Cinderella-Pogo opens it they blow the trumpet right in his face: FRAMP! Practically blows his fur off. First comic book I ever bought for myself. Ha, rationalizing again, he says.

Haven't you heard about Snarly Seibel? He up and joined the Navy. They haven't cooled him off though—he's still threatening to send in a story. And we're still threatening to take a vacation.

THE OLD GUARD
by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Dear Sam: Ever since you referred to me as "an articulate feminine fan," I've been gracefully inarticulate, lest I destroy the illusion. However, two or three things in the recent TWS (August) have roused my commenting zeal again.

First—QUAKER LADY AND THE JELPH—the most excellent story, in my limited opinion, that thee has published this year. However, I wish thee had bothered to ascertain that in the "Plain speech", the grammatical form is usually "thee *is*" rather than "thee are". Or at least, so I have always *heard*. This minor error jarred on me so repeatedly that I had to read the story twice. (Is that bad?).

But to proceed to the reason why I liked it so well. Mainly, because of the slap it took at so-called "social adjustment." I've long been of the opinion (ever since, in fact, I resigned in disgust from a teacher-training college) that modern education is going at the problem wrong side to. Instead of teaching children to do their best, function at their optimum, and do their own thinking about ethical, social and moral standards, they focus on a thing called "social adjustment" which means, simply, finding the human lowest common denominator, calling him "normal," for forcing the rest of the class into his standard pattern. Of course this makes him extraordinarily susceptible to subtle psychological suggestion, mild mass hypnosis and

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propaganda, leading to an easy assumption of power by those who have studied mob psychology. They smooth this over by calling it "co-operation," and referring to man as a gregarious animal.

True, maybe but the unmannerly descendant of the Bandar-log isn't quite an ape. In fact, he lost his apish pack-habits when he evolved into homo sapiens from homo neanderthalis, and most of his progress has been due to his individual thinking and achievement. Co-operation has achieved many things—granted. But it has been co-operation among individually thinking individuals—not the flock-of-sheep co-operation which is all too common in modern grade schools, high schools and colleges. I like what Talbot Mundy had to say about that business of subtle suggestion and propaganda . . .

"Train yourself to live alone and think alone. . . . meeting others only as man to man, instead of sheep in a flock of sheep, and you become immune to that kind of thing."

LORDS OF THE MORNING was a delightful story, and most delicately handled. It's nice to read a story where—for once—the hero doesn't get the girl. I notice that your most recent stories carry today's free-and-easy sexual morals into the future—noticing that "morality" has become gradually less strict about sex in the last hundred years, they jump to the conclusion that the trend will continue. But things go in cycles—a pendulum swinging first one way, then the other. In 2,000 AD we might find a companionate marriage the licensed and logical thing, and two hundred years later we might find that the pendulum had swung backward and women were once again being laced into disfiguring corsets and hidden in harems. I'd like to see some treatment of the male-female relationship which doesn't simply (and illogically) assume that today's feminist fad will continue ad infinitum. There might be a re-acession of masculine racial virility—though judging by the crop of males that today's standardizations are producing, it's doubtful within the next hundred years at least.

Readers who agree with me might enjoy reading Ayn Rand's THE FOUNTAINHEAD—the best book of the century, in my opinion, and true science fiction in the sense of being a forward-looking book.

You asked us to cut our letters short, so I'll cut, but before I leave, I'd like to ask why nobody ever writes to me any more: Not just me—all BNFs have that trouble. When I was new to fandom, for every letter printed in a magazine, I would receive twenty or thirty letters from other fans. Now that I've become one of the "Old Guard" by dint of six years of diligent fanning, nobody ever writes me—nobody except old friends, that is. I'm still eager to meet newcomers to fandom, and darn it, I've answered every letter I ever got, except the ones that were phrased in such insulting terms that I could have answered only with abusive language! Of course, I didn't answer the anonymous stinkers, but who could?

Incidentally, you might be glad to learn, that the anonymous drip whom I excoriated in a previous letter, came out in a manly fashion and owned up. It seems that he had had several letters published in a magazine I *never* read, and though I should have recognized the postmark, since he is the only fan in that town. However, I still have the feeling that anonymous letters in a field like fandom, are utterly abominable.—*Box 246, Rochester, Texas.*

You haven't damaged your reputation for being intelligently articulate with us by this letter. And we'll go along with you to some extent on your gripe about today's so-called "social adjustment." In fact, some of our most advanced psychology is about as advanced as voodoo. And too much of our proudest social progress is no more than what you call finding the lowest human common denominator. This is probably even more true of adult society than of children's education, because in the educational system there are at least changes—attempts at progress, something which is bitterly contested in society at large. And children at least are taught ideals, where as their elders merely give lip service to their ideals and run their private lives on a different system. But that's another story. . . . If you're lonesome you can always write me.

THE RETORT COURTEOUS

by Fletcher Pratt

Dear Sam: More in sorrow than in anger I observe Dr. Carpenter's castigation of the details in DOUBLE JEOPARDY. More in sorrow, I say, because I consulted a drug manufacturer with regard to the possibilities of perizone, and the result was what he gave me.

However, there are two questions involved. One is what the drug is said to do, and the other is what it really will do. We all know nowadays of drugs which are claimed to cure practically everything, but turn out to cure only about a third of what is claimed for them. Sulphanilamide is a good example; it is a useful drug, but it won't do all the things people said about it in the beginning. You will kindly note that in DOUBLE JEOPARDY it is nowhere stated authoritatively that *perizone* will do all these things; it is only stated that somebody says so, and the somebody may very well be wrong. The actual elements that appear in the story are that it does cure leukemia and it produces a high degree of suggestibility, and I think it is quite possible to postulate a drug that does these two things. After all, marijuana produces suggestibility, even if it doesn't cure anything, and yohimbine produces suggestibility in certain directions. Dr. Carpenter has made the mistake of thinking that all my characters are speaking the absolute truth, in spite of the fact that several of them are caught in lies.

The second point is that he calls my postulation of "personal privacy" laws a fallacy. It seems to me not unreasonable to imagine future laws that will protect personal privacy very carefully, as a backswing of the pendulum that has been swinging in the other direction for some time. Such laws may make trouble for the public health boys, but the licensing of peddlers to sell food from open pushcarts on the street isn't very good for public health, either, and that is done under the law. That is, public health is not the only consideration

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in law-making.

Also, I did put into the story the fact that the administration of *perizone* was under the most careful control, with a governmental agency to enforce it. What does he want me to do?—assume that all the laws in force in 1952 will remain unaltered in 2025?—*32 West 58th Street, New York, 19, N. Y.*

This, in more finished array, is in tune with what we suggested to Dr. Carpenter last time. We are gratified to find esteemed author Pratt both scientific and meticulous in his selection of detail, though this comes as no news to us.

FANDOM AND EGOBOO

by Derek Pickles
Sec. Bradford Science-Fiction Assoc.

Dear Mr. Mines: On the strength of holding subscriptions to both TWS & SS I am writing to comment on the Mag '52 issue of TWS which arrived this morning.

First impression was one of deep regret at seeing the familiar masthead on the cover had been altered. After how many years??. I liked the story titles in a box instead of being sprawled all over the cover painting.

As usual letters first, primarily to see whose letters have been printed, then to read those from people I know of, then the remainder. I am sick of demands for Captain Future; having read most of them from sheer force of circumstances (during the shortage but of all the overgrown Captain Marvel characters that have rayed their way through the pages of the pulps CF took some beating. If CF devotees want to remember their 'hero' and keep their mental image of him, let them read the old stories again, for if Hamilton should write any more CF will certainly not be as enjoyable as he seems in retrospect. Other letters leave me slightly cold, religious definitions suffer from the same troubles as trying to define any other attitude of mind; every mind has a different definition for the same phenomenon (in place of a better word). This kind of argument rapidly becomes tedious as everyone suffers from prejudices which colour his attitude towards the world around, prejudices which cannot be sublimated. Enough of this futile playing with words, on to the Frying Pan—which column(!) leaves me with a bewildered feeling as to what all the rumpus is about, and I do miss the egobeautiful fanzine reviews, cannot room be even found for a couple an issue??. No! Oh well, I suppose we must bear Bixby and his attitude to actifandom, wonder what fandoms attitude to Bixby is??.

The stories—well seeing only about 25% of the letters mention the stories in the previous issue, I'll be with the minority, as always, and mention them. Hamilton blood and thunder again, oh dear, and I was hoping great things after the last 2 or 3 issues. THE COUNTERFEIT suffers from the fact JWC did the same plot so well on WHO GOES THERE, a gallant try, but only an outer hit. CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS—if this is supposed to be humour I'm lacking the seventh sense, if not humourous, I'm still lacking in appreciation. THE MIDDLE OF THE WEEK AFTER—enjoyable. HALLUCINATION—nice twist end. Smith's story—unsual setting-facile ending. SORT OF LIKE A FLOWER—pure atmosphere.

Isn't there another way to send my copies of TWS and SS? They arrive rolled in a small piece of thin brown paper with both ends shredded and crushed into a flattened oval as though the entire content of the hold of the ship were carefully packed directly on top of my particular copy of TWS.

A nice Schomburg mechanical cover soon please. All enquiries about the Bradford SF Association welcomed.—*22 Marshfield Place, Bradford, Yorks, England.*

The question of shredded magazines has now been dumped into the lap of our production department, accompanied by a pained look. If some better method of mailing can be worked out it will be done.

Since you have subscriptions to both TWS and SS, you must have noticed that the fan columns are not quite the same in each. THE FRYING PAN in TWS tends to be chatter, the REVIEW OF FAN PUBLICATIONS in SS does review fanzines. However, some of each is likely to creep into the other, if you follow me.

Thanks for the virile support on Cap Future—Excelsior and all that sort of thing.

ONCE OVER LIGHTLY

by Jim Harmon

Dear Sam: You had better prepare yourself for a shock, Sam. I've decided to write another letter to TWS. If I can stand it, you should. You get paid for it. I've often wondered . . . how much of me can a human's mind stand? Well, be of good cheer, old thing. This will probably be rather short. I can't waste all evening on you. I've got Ackerman now (said the Fly of the Spider) and *you know* what *that* means. Why do you editors fight him? *There is NO escape.* (I had to nearly break his arm to get the manacles on me.)

Son of the Rift—stirring. I'll dive right into this—scimitar between teeth, Tom Mix cap pistols in hand. Pardon me while I turn down the radio.

Sam, you have a genius for saying the right thing at the wrong time—at times. True, your covers have improved mightily in past years, but this October issue of TWS wasn't the one in which to mention it. Not with that BEM ogling the bite-size babes and guy through a microscope. Come now, Hugo; you don't start running Keller's *Human Termites* until next month—or is this suppose to be for *The Green Intelligence?* (That sounds a little too scat—pardon.) Bergey's going to keep on improving in this direction, huh? No obvious comments.

So the terrible twins (or trio) become the Fearsome Foursome with SPACE STORIES. Well, to hail with it. Hail! You know, that's what I like about Standard. It has its grubby little fingers right on the pulse of its readers. Too bad it uses a dollar watch. I would say a total of 99% of your readers would have preferred one of the

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following to SPACE STORIES: 1. Monthly publication of WONDER. 2. Revival of STRANGE STORIES. 3. Revival of CAPTAIN FUTURE MAGAZINE. Naturally, good old Standard gives us—how can you abbreviate it?—SS or SPACE are otherwise occupied—SPACE STORIES. Take STRANGE. There is a boom in fantasy (as opposed to stf) in comic books, TV, and movies—why shouldn't some smart publisher make the most out of it in fiction magazines? Some already are—FANNY is very successful. Of course, I'm glad we got—?—SPARS if we couldn't get the other. I'm a sucker for good space opera.

But to the stories. Wallace West is one of our greatest stf writers and it's a dirty shame he isn't generally recognized as such. Among his other virtues, he invented sex before Kinsey. Hope these Yahnia stories get published as a book. One made THE BEST OF SF. It comes between THE BIRD OF TIME and LURE OF POLARIS somewhere doesn't it?

Two series novelets. Vance can't carry an outdated idea with smooth writing; and the idea of a stf detective is out-dated. Of course, Manning Draco is—hurump—"real george".

I learned that last phrase from a femme passifan Miss Marlene Maples. Vick and Gibson NOTE: She looks pretty good in a bathing suit.

Cover boys and religion (I've had my day there) are mostly about which THE READER SPEAKS. I have a suggestion to cure all those girls of wanting men on the cover. Put Bixby's picture there. He's not so bad looking but *that expression.* At least, in the one picture I've seen of him. God! The lips moistened, the eyes shining, the fiendish grin, crouched ready to spring. It *scares* me to think of it. The picture must have been taken either in the kitchen or the bedroom. Give that man something to eat! Or have the decency to leave him alone with her.

That reminds me. You say Dagmar's 42 is part avoirdupois, Sam? I got a question. *Who cares?* But if you like slender girls with bigger Dag ratings I refer you to model Irish McCalla, 44, 26, 36, and showgirl Tempest Storm, 44, 25, 37.

That brings us back to the subject of women (did we leave it?). Finlay put feathers on the Yahnaites' breasts. Ain't logical. Seems to me they would have feathers where human girls have hair and none of the girls I know have hair on their chests. What kind of girls do you and Virgil go out with, Sam?

On that note I'll leave you to write a story about a man who falls in love with a spaceship and in a fit of passion throws himself into her rocket tubes. Makes an ash of himself, of course. Speaking of such things, how's Bixby these days? . . . Noticed you just paraphrased a FSM letter of mine in showing the advantages of your present format over digest-size. Only trouble, I couldn't think of any virtues for untrimmed edges, could you? . . . This new cover format for TWS really isn't the last word, Sam. The picture should have some kind of border and be free of lettering, and the title cut would look better with W in caps and T and S in script. As said the time-traveler, "I'm out of space."—*427 E. 8th St., Mt. Carmel, Ill.*

Is there anything you left out of this gentle raking over? Let's see if I can find something I can agree with you about. Yep, sure 'nough. I agree the October ish was no time to brag about improving covers. You said it. Well, let's see what we can fight about. Who told YOU 99% of our readers would have preferred Cap Future back. For all the noise they make, you know how many members have flocked to Moskowitz' banner of FUTURE FOREVER? At the last tally there were exacty NINE (count 'em—9). This is a mass movement? But we love Moskowitz who toils on his father's farm to get the quarters for TWS and SS, not to mention train fare to Chi for the convention—we love him so much that we're likely to break down and put out a special edition of Cap Future just for him.

Where'd you get those ratings for Irish McCalla? We ran a story on her in SEE and I don't remember 44,26,36 dimensions. Is it possible? Ain't something I'd be likely to forget, either.

Stop picking on Finlay. He had to throw in a little covering, want us banned from the newsstands? No, I never knew any girls with hair on their chests either, but there's always electrolysis.

Offhand, I can't think of any virtues of untrimmed edges either, except that it costs something and we're trying to hold the line at two bits for the magazine instead of going higher as so many others have done. Or don't you care?

GOODIES IN A ROW

by Richard E. Geis

Dear Sam: I liked the new format of the August THRILLING WONDER STORIES even more than that of the July STARTLING STORIES. I almost suggested in my letter to you re the July SS, that bleeding the picture off either side of the cover would've been better. After seeing the changed TWS with even the *bottom* bleeding like a stuck pig, I'm not so sure. Framing the SS cover painting seemed to give it more "class". However, the TWS cover certainly didn't *need* framing. The composition of that painting is near perfection. My eyes were riveted to that cover for at least three minutes. First you see the girl looking at something. You follow her gaze to the skeleton, then to the spaceship, to the two men in the background who are looking at the girl who is looking at the skeleton. Your eyes keep going in circles, absorbing details of the picture, and always returning to the girl and the skeleton. If ever there was a picture worth ten thousand words, this is another.

And all the while you study the picture, the story possibilities it sets forth are just begging to be used. The first rocket to Mars, the first men to walk on another planet, and then find *human* bones. A cover like that demands to be written. Will somebody please write that cover? I'll go nuts wondering how those bones got there.

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Just finished Ed Hamilton's *Lords of the Morning* two minutes ago. I'm writing these comments as soon as I finish a story. You are getting the praise and criticism hot off the griddle. (this is a metaphor?)

You were right about Ed's style being new and sparkling. The story was excellent, the best of its type I've read, and I've been reading science-fiction for thirteen years. The story was vivid, colorful, and it *moved*. It had a certain authenticity, a feeling of sincerity, an aura of trueness that gripped me, glued me to my overstuffed, and would not let me stop reading until I'd finished it. And, better, I didn't know it would end as it did. There were so many ways it could have ended, well. . . . I guessed wrong. The fact that I had to *guess*. . . .!! My heartfelt thanks for a damn good story. More like it and more Hamilton.

Just finished *Counterfeit* by Alan E. Nourse. An excellent story. Personally, I'd have liked the Doc to win the battle with the aliens. I'm sitting here pinching myself and not yet over the shock of finding two such high quality stories in one issue of your magazine. Oh, just one little thing—I find it hard to believe that an unknown writer could smash into print with such an excellent story as has Nourse. The technique, the style, the background, all point to the logical assumption that Nourse is just a name for a well known science-fiction writer or editor. I'll guess it's Jenkins. And if it were true would you admit it?

Just finished *The Middle of the Week After Next* by Murray Leinster. I found it to be real fine, high type chuckle-bait. Yep, right good fantasy.

This can't go on you know. Three goodies in a row is almost unbelievable.

Just finished *Hallucination* by Fritch. It was a neat twist, but a bit labored. That particular theme is beginning to look like a corkscrew.

Just finished reading *Cholwell's Chickens* by Jack Vance. Well . . . readable, eminently readable, but . . . Vance has a knack of creating characters that *live*, and locals that are *real*. However, all his superb style and ability couldn't save the plot. Specifically, it took too many words to formulate the problem, set up the characters, move Jean to Codiron, and get into the meat of the story. But, Vance is good; very nearly as good as Kuttner.

The Quaker Lady and the Jelph by Phyllis Sterling Smith was a neatly written item, and I felt the proper emotions while reading it. I do feel that the ending was too pat, too quickly reached. I'd say that the story idea was a trifle too big for the short treatment received.

Sam, I sometimes wonder if you get anything out of an analysis of this type. I mean, the stories being dicussed are old and all but forgotten to you, while new to me. Can you remember each story and appreciate my comments or must you get a copy of the issue in question and turn to the title page to refresh your memory? Right now you're probably working on the Demember TWS, there are SS and FS to be worked on, these letters, an editorial, reading a mountain of stories, chasing the receptionist . . . Gad, but you've got a job!

Get used to seeing my name, Sam, I'm determined to bombard you with letters every month, and be a regular letter hack who will appear in your letter columns year after year after year. . . .

Sort of Like a Flower by Jerome Bixby was another good short story. A real think piece: only two or three pages, but it left volumes unspoken. Bixby showed courage in letting his effort lay there, naked and unprotected, right next to "The Reader Speaks".

Sam. I know this letter is too long, but there's only one more item.

THE FAN WHO WROTE A LETTER
He turned the pages furiously
"If it ain't in here . . . I'll sue!"
He wasn't looking for money
He was looking for lovely egoboo.

Sam, you *know* you'll have to print that poem. Not because it's good, but because it does show a kernel of truth, however sloppily. Besides, I'll sue.—*2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon, Apt. 106.*

At last—a man who appreciated that Emsh as I did. You know that's the only reason I left your poem in?

What do I get out of your analysis? Personally I get a lot, though statistically there may not be enough evidence to form any conclusions. It's true I'm working six to nine months ahead so that the stories you discuss are old—but not forgotten. Never forget a story. Rarely have to go back and look it up. Not stories. Letters yes, he said, chuckling fiendishly.

HUMANS AND BEINGS

by Sylvia Wilson

Dear Ed: I've been noticing the batting around sex has been getting. (How could you help but notice it?) So here's my two cents.

People like to read about people. The good authors (I consider Bradbury and Heinlein good) deal with people's thoughts and reactions to environment and unusual circumstances. All a science fiction author does is to plan out the unusual places and happenings.

In case nobody has heard before, sex is one of the psychological bases of human behavior. In fact, it is the main one. I would like to know how you are going to write a story about a human being and remove the main motivating power behind his actions.

If anybody can answer that I'd be very much interested. Don't forget there's more to sex than boy meets girl.

Well, now that I've sounded off, I'd like to tell you how much I enjoyed LORDS OF THE MORNING. It was the best story I've read in a long time and COUNTERFEIT was very well written, even if it was an old plot. I really enjoyed these two stories. The rest were all right, they just didn't leave any impression. But don't let that worry you, or the authors. Everybody has different tastes, thanks goodness, although it would be a lot easier on you if everyone liked the same things.

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If anyone would like to correspond I'd be very happy to do so.—*Hi-Ho Rancho Cafe, Rt. 1, Barstow, Calif.*

A logical premise. Of course not every action is motivated by sex so that conceivably you could have a story in which the hero is after a goal which has nothing to do with sex. And in such cases we do not strain after it, as we have before now patiently explained to those who had the idea we were changing the title to "Thrilling Snappy Wonder Stories." However, you might argue that if you go back far enough in a human's subconscious you'll find that everything he does or wants is more or less governed by his desire for approval from the opposite sex and his need for love. In other words a man doesn't want to get rich for himself, but to impress some blonde; he doesn't want to be the first to land on Mars for its own sake, but so he can come home and brag about it to an admiring female and so on. In that sense you always do get back to sex as the prime motivation. Disgusting, isn't it?

PLAYING GAMES
by S/Sgt. Joe Springard

Dear Mr. Mines: I have been reading TWS for almost a year now, most copies being sent to me in Korea by a Special Service Member in Japan. Between TWS and the Korean war my time went fast over there (all 18 months of it.)

Your stories seem to get better as they go along with the exception of a few. One in particular, CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS, by Jack Vance (August issue) was really hard to take. Vance has a mind I'd like to explore 'cos the story was a bit peculiar. His mind must be playing games with him to send out something like that. I won't ask if you agree after you passed the story for publication. What did you think of it, huh?

On the other hand, a story like COUNTERFEIT, by Alan Nourse (same issue) was great. It kept me in suspense, but should have been a little longer. I really enjoyed it. Is it possible to have one of his stories in the September issue and most of the coming issues?—*Westover Air Force Base, Mass.*

We liked CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS, of course; we usually like all the stories or we wouldn't pick them. But our likes and dislikes are not always based on the purely emotional reaction of an individual reading for pleasure. A famous Satevepost editor once put it this way: No story in an issue should please more than twenty percent of his readers. Because those twenty who liked one story are not going to like others and in the remaining eighty percent there are again factions which will like one story and not another. If a reader liked *all* the stories he would immediately conclude he had a bad issue, for other readers would dislike all. Therefore he works for variety, so that each one will find something he likes.

I am grieved you don't like Vance though. Seriously, I consider him one of the great story tellers of our field. His story sense is exceptionally true; he is never misled by secondary motives or enticed into dry routines, lectures or sermons. He never forgets he has a story to tell and the telling is superbly colorful and moving and real. You've read BIG PLANET in September SS? You owe me a letter.

QUAKER OATS
by R. C. Sandison

Dear Sir: You were right, I think, in saying ABERCROMBIE STATION called for a sequel. But if just one Jean Parlier needs two stories for her personality what do you think EIGHT of them require? There should be a law against publishing such a story without having a sequel right on the editor's desk, ready for scheduling. Now, seriously, Mr. Mines, you ARE going to let us know what happens to Mr. Mycroft and his eight—uh—daughters, aren't you? Tell Vance to get the lead out and write that follow-up but pronto!

I don't propose to rate or even criticize all the stories, but I'd give CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS a fifty-fifty split on first place. The other half being taken by THE QUAKER LADY & THE JELPH. (Actually how are two stories so utterly different to be compared? It's like asking "Which do you like better—Southern Fried Chicken or Sherry Cobbler?" Both are delicious—on different occasions!) Still, the Q. L. & The J is a type of story I especially like and Miss (Mrs.?) Smith has written it better than any other I can recall reading.

Seems to fit into the more-or-less religious themes that have been popping up in TRS lately. I'm a heathen myself, but I do have the deepest respect for those Orthodox Quakers who are almost unique in trying to live the religion that everyone else preaches. No doubt there can be Quaker jerks, too (seems to me Herbert Hoover is a Quaker of sorts) but for the church as a whole, I'd say they're the only sect practicing actual Christianity on this continent.—*Box 1884, Denver 1, Colo.*

As we were saying about opinions. . . .

AND OPINIONS
by (Miss) Rusty Silverman

Dear Sam Mines: I just had to write to tell you what a terrific issue of TWS the August issue was. No kidding, every single story was tops and I don't see how anyone could possibly rate the stories since each would have been number one if they had appeared separately.

I must add an extra plug for THE QUAKER LADY AND THE JELPH. VERY good. Is Phyllis Sterling Smith a new writer? I don't recall seeing her byline before.

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Only one criticism on the issue and that was the editorial. It seems to me the topic is getting stale.

The cover was good and I liked all the inside illos except the Schomberg of Aryll. This is beauty?

That's all for now. Since I don't have any criticism my letter is short. But I thought you'd like to know what a hit this issue made down here. —*1939 S.W. 14 Terrace Miami, Florida.*

Liked them all?? Catastrophe! No, that only proves what good judgment she has. I liked them all too.

Phyllis Sterling Smith is a comparatively new writer. QUAKER LADY was her first sale to us; THE BEST POLICY appeared in SS for July and NOTICE OF INTENT in SS for October. Most first writers grope for awhile, but Mrs. Smith caught the essence of science-fiction on her first try—a sure touch and a solid grasp.

Sorry about the editorial and the spot picture of Aryll. She looked better in the bigger drawing, didn't she? Can't always tell how these pictures will reduce.

TARA TALE

by Ted Keenan

Dear Editor: I first read your magazine in 1940 when I was nine years of age. So great an impression had it on me that I can even now remember the issue clearly. The lead story was "The Crystal World" and the cover depicted an egg-shaped space ship spraying multi-colored beams of light on the crystal covered surface of some impossible planet. It was a very second-hand mag. being, in fact, one of the old Science Wonder Stories issues. Beside it in the window was what I since learned to be the first issue of this magazine showing a squat bullet-shaped space-craft racing Moonwards at an angle of forty-five degrees across the cover. Alas, my slender pocket money didn't allow me to buy the two. As those dark days of war and shortage grew darker and my understanding of what I read grew brighter those tattered magazines grew scarcer until at one time it made me literally delirious with delight to see on the scrap heap in a junk shop a copy of Astounding which featured the never to be forgotten "Galactic Patrol." A short time after this I was fortunate in coming across a dozen or so copies of 1929-1932 vintage Wonder Stories Quarterlies. Words, no, only telepathy could describe the pleasure I got from reading these. Since then I have only come across two or three Quarterlies.

Many Americans think of Ireland in terms of Killarney dotted here and there with an odd ruined abbey and a Round Tower or two—each thatched cottage with its own beribboned pet pig by the fireside. Yet, in their hearts they know that it is far from thus. The ruined abbeys are there and so are the round towers but the highways hum with the traffic of a very modern nation and sixteen-wheel trucks and Chrysler cars are as common as the donkey and cart in the conventional picture of my country.

For me, however, my mind's eye picture of the United States will always recall the courage and enterprise of the men who dared to put on the intensely competitive market of the 1929-1940 period, magazines which mentioned atomic bombs ("Margaret of Urbs," and circa 1940 but still pre 1945, "Blowups Happen" to mention just two) and interstellar travel as carelessly as their competitors treated of lariats and murder. Such giants of imaginative literature as Hugo Gernsback and F. Pratt whose Ralph 124.C+ and "Onslaught From Rigel" I was fortunate enough to obtain and shall never forget.

Nok, I find myself haunted by thoughts of magazines I missed in the past, now, no doubt, long since destroyed. There was one which featured the sequel to Clark Ashton Smith's masterpiece, "The City of the Singing Flame"—"Beyond the Singing Flame." Another featured a story the title of which I cannot properly remeber—"The White Lily" I think it was. I have never read the celebrated "Triplanetary" series or the even more famous "Skylark" series. For years I have searched for the issue of T.W.S. containing S. G. Weinbaum's, "Martian Odyssey." Of course I have always known that these magazine hunts of mine are doomed from the start since the issues I search for probably never came into the country since nobody throughout the length and breadth of the island seems to have taken a serious interest in science fiction. Nowadays, except for a few British magazines published at irregular intervals, an s.f. mag. is indeed a strange sight on Dublin newsracks. You will agree that this is a sad fate for the city in which once lived the great Dean Swift who, although one of the earliest pioneers of s.f., is now known only for his "Gulliver's Travels."

It has occurred to me that some of the more fortunate s.f. fans may have some back numbers of ANY mag. lying about in their attics or closets for which they no longer have any use. If they will send me these however few, old, torn, or tattered, (in fact the older the better), I promise to kiss the Blarney Stone for them next time I am there. Although s.f. has advanced by leaps and bounds in plot and presentation during the last five years the pre 1945 mag. carries for me a thrill I rarely get from the modern product. However, I suppose time, like distance, lends enchantment.—*28a Tara St., Dublin, Republic of Ireland.*

Trips into the past seem an integral part of science-fiction but a man with a memory like yours doesn't need a time machine. Hope you get the magazines you want.

MORALS AND MORALE

by Joe Keogh

Dear Sam Mule: For just once a guy would like to know what's going on in the art dept. over there. What about this artist EMSH? Does the four-letter phrase stand for his last name (it could be Sam Emsh for all we know!) or, could it stand for his initials? Please straighten me out on that one.

THE QUAKER LADY AND THE JELPH was one of the best short stories you've had in TWS for some time. Congrats. Re. the MIDDLE

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OF THE WEEK AFTER NEXT, I think *Leinster* should bolt his door and go hide in the closet, while Bixby's (maybe being an editor went to his head) offering of SORT OF LIKE A FLOWER shows the limits that some people will go to, in order to get a moral out of a science-fiction story. COUNTERFEIT got in under the wire with a fair plot with a new twist to the old guess-who's-the-alien-now sort of thing.

All in all, it was a pretty good ish, and I like it better than some other stf mags on the market. Wait a sec- someone's at my telescreen.

"No! Not the editor of F.F.F.F.F.F.F.F?

Get Away! Don't point that super-sonic dis-ray at me! The Schlopenhaufer Fuse is connected! GN/N/N/N/N/G/G/G/G!"—*36 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, Ont., Canada.*

Emsh is Ed Emshwiller, a handsome, robust young man with a wide variety of techniques, all executed with dash and zeal and who signs his work variously as: Emsh, Emsler, Ed Alexander or as the Muse directs. He is also a fan —reads the stuff with gusto and occasionally shows up at a fan convention. That's why his pictures show so much imagination. But who am I telling this to? Aren't you disintegrated?

WOMAN'S PLACE

by James B. Hardin a/3c

Dear Ed: Orchids to your line. It is one of the top on the market. I see some characters are eternally finding fault with the covers. In my estimation that are probably the best in the field. Some readers want more men on the covers with less covers on the men. I can think of nothing I would care to see less of than men. They have their place but I'd rather look at women any time. Let's change "A woman's place is in the home" to "on the cover."

Anybody want to write to me? I promise to answer all letters.—*1906-3AACS DET., Mt. Home AFB, Idaho.*

All this talk about women on the covers or under the covers is beginning to make me blush. Leave us turn our attention to more intellectual matters.

THOSE TASTES AGAIN

by Gwen Cunningham

Dear Sam: I am writing you about the August issue, a rose among thorns this month. After moving to Sacramento I have to wait for my husband's ship to get back in before I can move to Seattle, our future home for two years. Good old Navy life! Anyhow, my sub goes to the old address, but I don't want to change it till we move to our more permanent abode. So I've missed a couple of issues on all my subs—I have about five—all stf of course!

Well, the other day I couldn't wait till early September to get the subs sent to me, so off I went to buy them at the local drugstore. [*Turn page*]

TO PEOPLE Who Want To Write

but can't get started

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want to report that *only* in TWS did I find a really *good* issue. The rest have all slipped, even SS, which I mentioned in a letter to you addressed to That Mag.

But TWS—what a relief to find a wonderful cover—Hamilton's LORDS OF THE MORNING, Nourse's COUNTERFEIT, Vance's CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS, Leinster's MIDDLE OF THE WEEK AFTER NEXT, THE QUAKER LADY AND THE JELPH, Bixby's SORT OF LIKE A FLOWER and interior art work all good, better or best in quality. Even Fritch, HALLUCINATION was fair. All the rest were excellent, if not perfect. I had a perfect field day, honest, and a sense of satisfaction in finding such a jewel when so many others had failed me; in some cases entirely.

As for deciding which story was best, I can't. They were all fine. But I can tell you the kind that appealed to me most, because of my own peculiar personality. These stories, in the order of my preference are:

1. CHOLWELL'S CHICKENS
2. THE QUAKER LADY AND THE JELPH
3. SORT OF LIKE A FLOWER
4. LORDS OF THE MORNING

If this list tells you anything about me, I'll not mind too much. I know I am a very odd person, because everybody told me years ago that Marlene Dietrich and Charles Boyer in "Garden of Allah" were big flops. Knowing myself as I did, I decided to go and see for myself where the flop came in. I cried buckets, went home in a dream and still can't forget the beauty of the picture. So of course I'm nuts and what stories I like are undoubtedly terrible. Just the same, bless you for printing an entire issue full of things I liked very much. Maybe you're nuts too, so—hi, pal. I'm with you! Another issue like it, just for me, huh?

I'd send you a hug but you know how husbands are, so see you next issue.—*N & N Trailer Park, 2950 Auburn Blvd., Sacramento, Cal.*

This is becoming confusing. Another one who liked an entire issue! Harmon, are you there? What was that remark about saying the right thing at the wrong time? I gotta genius that way.

Gwen, your trouble is only that you are both romantic and sentimental. Not only your weeping buckets at an out-and-out tear jerker, but your selection of story choices would seem to indicate it. Well, it ain't nothing to be ashamed of, as long as you can explain it to your husband. You're always welcome here.

BLUDGEON

by Maxime R. Goldenhirsch

Dear Mr. Mines: First, I want to express my thanks for your printing my plea for STF in your mag. A number of people answered sending me mags; I am thanking them individually, but would like to do so again from SS's pages.

Second, some comments. Science-Fiction can serve three purposes: entertain, educate and give food for thought. It entertains, by mixing imagination with humor, sex, adventure and violence. Each of these mixtures and composites satisfy different groups of persons. The space opera is a valid piece of STF, *provided* it is published in a mag dedicated to the proper sort of public.

A "high-class" mag is one supplying a *wide* and intelligent (ave rage) public with STF which entertains them, *and* develops their scope of thought. A "first class" mag would be one educating its readers, *not* to definite ideas, but to certain systems of thought, such as the scientific method applied to everyday life, or a dispassionate contemplation of causes and effects (rather than response to indoctrination—cultural and otherwise) or a participation) in the decisions taken "in the name of a public" (or a nation, or a planet). Such a "first class" mag, should do that while entertaining them and widening their scope.

Science-Fiction, like every cultural pattern dependent of imagination, is a revolutionary weapon. It prepares a wide public, indoctrinates it not to be surprised by scientific and social developments. 90% of the general public could have been knocked over with a feather after Hiroshima—the STF readers just shuddered. That their shudders were not transformed in an action towards the outlawing and control of A-weapons is, in a way, the fault of STF.

Looking objectively at it, STF has not prepared its readers towards social changes in the same way it has done this towards scientific ones. The immense majority of "future societies" are either painted-over regimes of our times, or just repetitions of antique societies. And if there are some original social ideas, the changes are mostly presented like something monstrous: I remember, for instance, one story in which—5.000 years in the future—a society has abolished our present stupid marital system. At the end of the story, just for the duty of "satisfying" the good old XXth Century reader, the hero turns "atavist" and marries his girl. The same sort of nonsense and anti-development "moral code" is seen about everywhere. I will just mention in passing the "free trade on space" which the vast majority of writers think a matter of course. It should be apparent to everyone that spatial exploration and trade, under the best conditions, could only be a "planetal" enterprise. The only other possibility would be a society which has synthetized its necessities to such a point, that the individual in not more dependent of society for his needs. But that would eliminate automatically trade!

Perhaps my statements are a little didactic. I have, doubtless exaggerated in the heat of my exasperation. But the fact remains that STF's social pioneering is far, far behind its scientific work. A fact that could cost the planet some millions of human beings, and a long age of slavedom.

I would be interested in readers reactions to above statements.—*Maxime R. Goldenhirsch, P.O. B. 11, Tel-Aviv, Israel.*

We have before now made the point that too many science-fiction writers have gone backward instead of forward for their imagined future worlds and have revived ancient feudal systems complete with kings, dictators and other obsolete symbols instead of synthesizing new

[*Turn to Page 140*]

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ones. They have even resuscitated the all-but forgotten dialects to match. Why the people of 5000 years in the future should speak like Canturbury pilgrims passeth all understanding, yet many writers insist upon repeating this type of gruesome anomaly.

Otherwise—I have no objection to science fiction's being considered a force for reform, for progress or what have you. At the risk of quoting myself I repeat it can be all things to all men. Mind if I continue to think its primary purpose is entertainment?

FIVE TEN OR UNDER
by Juanita Wellons

Dear Sam: Having perused the letter column of the October TWS (you mean people read the stories too!) I've decided to get on Mari *A* n's man-wagon, or crusade, or whatever you want to call it.

However, may I enter a plea that if and when you ever give in to us gals, you might include an occasional fella who's shorter than the traditional six foot plus? There have been pictures of rather petite wimmen in prozines in the past, (and I assume the future, too) and I'm hoping to see an occasional male on a cover who's five ten or under. There *are* girls who like short men, and I think they'd like the idea.

Oh yes, somebody finally came back at Vick. Hooray! Of course, Vick will probably refuse to believe there is anything to the breed of homer saps except *his* particular brand of ideas on the subject.

So far, this has been a rather sane letter for me, as those few poor souls who know me can well judge . . . when their keepers let them out . . . but now I have one BIG gripe . . . THAT COVER! It ain't the subject matter—I don't object to a few good natured bems (though I prefer them cute) it's the whole style of the thing, or something. It's horrid! I almos' writ you a letter last month, going to congratulate you in capiTALL letters . . . excepting the fact, acourse, that it shoulda been a man instead a gal . . . But after this one . . . AND that shades of Cap'n Future on the SS . . . I wait with folded arms for further developments before I start complimenting.

Coupla lines back I mentioned Captain Future . . . (pardon me while I beat my head on the floor . . .) . . . as you can guess . . . he ain't my style . . . But for those who *do* like the Cap, may I second Joe Kinnon's motion for an Annish for Futurians.

Sorry, I tried to keep it short.—*529 Milton Ave., Anderson, Ind.*

P.S. Oh yes . . . what gives with Orban? It's hard to believe the stuff he does for you comes from the same area as those for ASF (or is that a cuss-word?)

P.SS. Beeyootifull Finlays . . . and who did the illo for FOOL'S ERRAND? . . . maybe it didn't print on my copy. . . .

This was a sane letter????. Okay, okay, unfold the arms. Want a man shorter than five-ten? See August SS cover. Nice? Stay right behind us, Cap Future won't get you. Anyway, Hank Moskowitz has him signed to a ten year contract.

S'matter with Orban? He's doing some very interesting new and imaginative work for us. You'll see it. The artist on FOOL'S ERRAND was Stevens. Also did THE PERFECT GENTLEMEN and GRAVESONG.

GOT A SUGGESTION
by Frank Goodwyn, Jr.

Dear Sam: I think the October TWS was a darn good issue. I liked best THE BIRD OF TIME. Next came THE POLLUXIAN PRETENDER and THE REASONABLE PEOPLE and THE KOKOD WARRIORS. I didn't care for the other two stories. I didn't care much for the October cover. Is that what a BEM looks like? The August cover was fine.

I've got a suggestion. Instead of making us wait two months for SS & TWS, and then buy them both at once, why don't you print TWS in October, SS in November, TWS in December, and so on? That way we wouldn't have to wait so long for the mags.

What are you going to call SPACE STORIES? You can't call it SS or people might think you are talking about STARTLING. I guess you'll have to call it SP-S or something.—*9709 Lorain Ave., Silver Spring, Md.*

Hoo, hah, friend Goodwyn has just discovered that old mainstay of magazine publishing—namely, the business of alternating your titles so that magazine A hits the stands in October, magazine B in November, magazine A again in . . . say, aren't we just repeating what he said? Anyhoo, Frank, that's exactly what we did for a great many years with SS and TWS, but now SS's monthly schedule tosses your suggestion out the window. SP-S to you too.

BOTTLE BABIES AND UBANGIS
by Joe Gibson

Sam, Cutie-Pie: Our li'l Miss Monroe danged sure wasn't 37 on the Dag-meter when she posed for that calender! But I understand she was a few weeks past her last dime and somewhat concerned about eating regularly, then. No doubt she's filled out a bit, what with making money.

But there was a big deal. The kid poses for a nude calendar when she's down on her luck, and later Hollywood (the movie Hollywood, that is) hears about it and they're shocked! Hollywood, the movie Hollywood, where movie actresses can sleep all over town so long as they make side-trips to Nevada to "legalize" it, and that's perfectly all right. So a kid comes along and gets her picture took au natural, just once, and that town is shocked. Ah, well—at least she got good publicity out of it. But who the hell are they kidding?

Enough of that. Sam, ol' dog-ears, how'd you blackmail Bergey to get yourself on the cover, this October TWS? I can see it there, nailed to your office wall, with the caption: "Mines pays close

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attention to readers' reactions." Yeh.

Thot Payne's short, "Fool's Errand," was the best thing in the past three or four issues.

But you can take your conditioning, Sam, and—I will take mine. Which is beautiful, unclad cover gals who have it, and real, live gals who're even more appealing for the feminine way they carry it around. And bulging-biceps, he-man cover boys to please the gals until a scrawny guy, namely me, can prove to 'em that biceps aren't necessarily necessary. After all, it's more fun to get hooked if you have to strive for it—or don't you remember back that far? Me, I've enjoyed just skimming close to that hook, but I guess sooner or later some babe will haul me in. It'll be a fight, tho. I am one tough fish, *I* am.

Hollow-chested. Knob-kneed. Stoop-shouldered. So you waddle around with a full field pack—full of cognac bottles, naturally—in a war and you, too, will get stooped. Not to mention other things. And foxholes half-full of water with ice forming on top is a neat way to get rheumatism, if you don't end up with a pair of stumps. And after that, buddy, you will let somebody else tote that barbell and ripple them muskles. You've had it.

A thing I don't understand, tho, is how these guys develop that spare tire around their middles. Of course, sitting down all the time takes care of the posterior, but a guy can add something around there and still have room for more. Where the pot forms is in front, and that I can't understand.

On either side of your tummy, Sam, is a couple sets of muscles whose function is to hold your tummy in where it oughta be. But if you wear your belt up around your wait, where most guys wear it, it'll bite in on those muscles and take over the job of holding your tummy in. Naturally, after a few years of this, those muscles deteriorate. Then it's up to the belt, and a belt just can't do the job as well. Another few years, and the tummy starts slipping under the belt.

You'll notice, tho, that truck-drivers and other guys in strenuous occupations have learned where to wear their pants. The belt's down on the hips, just above the hip-bones, about level with the belly-button. That's not just so they can strut, it's more comfortable. Even wild savages got more sense than to wear their breechclouts in a tight band around their tummy muscles.

Of course, we have avoirdupois, but it might be interesting to take this research a bit further. Early paintings indicate that plump gals were once as popular as skinny gals are now—but in those underfed times, it was as hard to find a plump gal as it is to find a skinny one now, which explains the popularity.

Why is it, I wonder, that a Ubangi girl starts off perfectly all right, bouncey but firm, and then goes to blazes after she starts feeding baby after baby, year after year—while the modern American girl has only a few babies and may bottle-feed them, but she straps herself in harness in her 'teens and by the time she's 30, she's as bad off as the Ubangi girl! Why, huh?

And it could very well be that woman does the same thing with her elastic waistband that man does with his trousers belt. The harem dancing girls in Olde Baghdad seemed to have the right idea. Those short, open vests, richly embroidered, would be just the thing for TV. And they knew

[*Turn page*]

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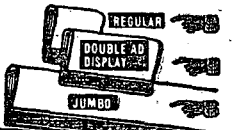

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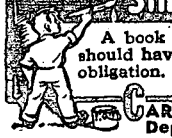

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THE DANGER IS REAL

CIVIL defense officials everywhere face a real handicap in our American talent for putting things off. We read that there is danger of war—but not before 1953, or 1954, or 1956. We sigh and relax. We know in our hearts that the danger is real. But we are content to wait until it is at our very doors before taking the first steps to protect ourselves.

Let's face it. So long as we need armed forces in a state of readiness, Main Street must be ready, too. We must get ready and stay ready for as long as the threat of aggression exists—five years, ten years, fifty years if need be.

The Kremlin never stops plotting to get what it wants. Some of us are still in the planning stage of the fight to keep what we hold most dear. The time to get busy is now. If an attack comes it can be met only by people who are trained and waiting, not by people who merely meant to be. What would you do if it happened tomorrow? You don't know? Then join your local civil defense organization today!

where to wear those silk pantaloons. Low—but not too low, snake-hips, not as low as those French bathing suits. Just over the hip-bones. 'Atta girl. The hula gals had the ver-r-ry same idea.

But if it isn't high-heels wrecking a gal's feet, it's these flat sandals giving 'em fallen arches. Only good thing that's happened is when they started wearing these low-heeled moccasins. But a young bobby-soxer bouncing around in an old shirt, wearing blue jeans - low, snake-hips style, with pennies in her moccasins, isn't necessarily sloppy. The gal just hasn't got old enough to be stupid!

I dunno. Civilization—hah! Remind me to tell yo why I hate automobiles sometime.—*24 Kensington Ave., Jersey City 4, N. J.*

Joe, I got all kinds of comments just bubbling on the tip of my typewriter, but no space. Nice letter too. Sorry. Also we got a few hundred more letters: Larry Farsace wants to buy copies of every fan mag ever published (s'matter with this guy?); Pat Elliott wants to know about stories depicting the natural history of other worlds (THINGS OF DISTINCTION, THE LOVERS, THE LONG VIEW); Joan Bragg of Palatka, Florida joins the family; C. Wallace Von Kirchenthal makes like a misanthrope in suggesting that women on covers be covered—with clothes or six feet of earth, Ray Capella wants longer novels, Bob Farnham wants to know how come Gregg Calkins got two letters in the last ish (I like to cut my throat when I discovered it Bob—what a flooper—that finishes Oopsla Calkins for the rest of the season); Em Johnson wants a prologue to LORDS OF THE MORNING; Valerie Langham of 1260 Loyola Ave., Chicago 26, Ill., wants correspondents, sides Marian Cox for more men on the covers and asks what is a Slan? Will someone tell her?

Fred Dwyer quarrels with our mathematics on the square cube law; Hank Moskowitz claims he is insulted by Jim Harmon's asking if he is my grandson because his grandfather is dead, ergo, I must be dead too and I'm not so he is insulted (you get it? Explain it to me); Jan Gardner of Apradelon, Canterbury, N. H. wants correspondents who crave to argue about occult matters; Evelyn Gatoe announces a new fan club for gals only (write to Marian Cox) and Gregg Calkins—ha! it'll be a cold day before you creep into these columns again, Wally Parsons wrote about four letters but we caught those in time; Norman Clarke liked the October cover (knew I'd find somebody who did); and Mike Wigodsky has a word about anerobic bacteria (he says they use oxygen, but not free oxygen—so something is free after all.)

Gotta go—see you all next ish.

—*The Editor*

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The FRYING PAN

A Commentary on Fandom

COUPLE of Saturdays ago we were sitting before our TV set, guzzling V-8 spiked with lemon juice and Worchestershire sauce, when a happy-voiced announcer said:

"Watch Channel — tonight for a new thrill in television entertainment! You've probably heard of science fiction, eh? H'm? Hey? Well, tonight, at seven o'clock, on the So-and-So Theatre, you will see an exciting half-hour science fiction drama! Be sure to —"

Or words to that effect.

At seven o'clock that night we were careful to watch; indeed, we approached the moment with a certain glow of expectation, for the So-and-So Theatre is a non-stf affair, presenting family-type shows, some of them rather good, and we imagined the appearance on it of a "science fiction drama" to be a bit of a step in the right direction.

So we watched. And we were never so damned disgusted in our life.

We feel sure that unwary TViewers, encountering this sort of yap on their screens labeled "science fiction," will in the future shriek and gallop into the woodwork at the very mention of the term. Such a disservice to stf has not been done since LIFE Magazine staggered us in our tracks last year with its myopic and distinctly uninformed report on the field.

The plot, to use the term loosely, was this: a comet "goes off course" near Jupiter, which event in some inexplicable manner immediately gives rise to a shower of meteors in Earth's atmosphere. A meteor lands near a mountain lodge in which a famous nuclear physicist and his wife are taking a vacation (he from slaving over retorts filled with bubbling water; she from throwing phobic fits at her husband's fool-

[Turn page]

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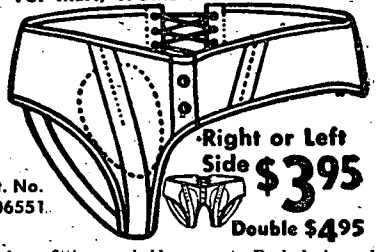

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ing around with those perfectly awful scary mysterious unGodly atom things.) The physicist rushes out and shortly returns clutching a hunk of meteorite, screaming with glee. . . .(He: *"The first meteor ever found . . .* and it's *warm!* A great scientific discovery! I must examine it!" She: "No . . . don't, John, I'm frightened! It's . . . *evil!"*

Ignoring her pleas, he whangs it with a hammer (S. O. P., apparently, in examining meteorites), whereupon a foot-high flame emerges and tells he and she, through a filter-mike, that at last It and Its race have been able to get to Earth (by the good graces of the comet's antics, evidently, after aeons of lusting for our planet while barreling about the universe in meteors), and now the human race is doomed to slavery and slow extinction as food for the flame beings. Physicist, after suitable sweaty agonizing under the flame's hypnotic control (the flame, supposedly a highly intelligent and objective super-being, has ordered him to strangle his wife for the sheer sadistic hell of it), picks up a vial of vitriol and squitches the dirty little monster. Then everybody faints. Upon reviving, they mutter: "Was it all . . . a dream?"

But no; there's the pool of vitriol, eating the finish off the tabletop.

Had enough? Well, listen to *this*:

At the outset, the physicist is bound and determined to get a good look at the comet; so once arrived at the lodge, he sets up his little 3" refractor and points it at Jupiter, in whose vicinity the comet is expected to "make its appearance." They gaze at Jupiter, which manages to twinkle, then go off and romp around for a while, returning a half-hour or so later.

The telescope is still pointing straight at Jupiter.

Before you ask . . . *no* clock-mechanism.

So . . the physicist stares tensely into this amazing instrument, while his wife tensely counts off the seconds . . . and suddenly, precisely on the count of *"Now . . ."*

WHAM!!!

The comet barges into the field of vision like a turpentined wombat, swerves to avoid hitting the planet, hovers indecisively for a moment or two and then streaks out of sight at approximately

$$\frac{3/4}{C.}$$

"Well," murmurs the physicist awedly, "there goes for another ten years! But . . . strange, according to my calculations, it's *off course!"*

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Wife: "Oh, John . . . I'm frightened! It's . . . *evil.*"

Three or four seconds pass . . . and . . .

WHAM!!!

Earth's sky is crawling with meteors . . . some of them strangely resembling comets with tails, and all of them zooming around in curved orbits like a bunch of sozzled fireflies in a coal mine.

Physicist: "H'm . . . [get this one, kids; it'll *never* be topped] . . . h'm . . . the comet must have *disturbed some of the minor constellations!*"

Wife: "Oh, John . . . I'm frightened! They're . . . *evil!*"

Three or four seconds pass . . . and . . .

WHAM!!!

This one big meteor comes howling down and slams into the mountainside near the lodge.

Wife faints . . . recovers. Physicist is leaping about in a scientific fervor (as indeed he has reason to do, as you shall see): "A *meteor* . . . a *meteor,* this'll make history! *None has ever landed before!*"

He turns to rush out.

Wife: (stretching imploring hands) "Oh, John . . . I'm frightened! (She staggers, passes hand over brow) It's all so . . . so *evil!* . . . those horrible things coming out of the sky!"

Physicist: (gruffly) "Nonsense, dear . . . there's nothing to be frightened about. Remember, I'm a scientist. I know about such things."

Soon he returns with meteorite in hand: "Here's a chunk of it . . . it blew up in landing! I'm going to examine it! Stand back, dear. . ."

He picks up a convenient hammer . . . and . . .

WHAM!!!

You take it from there . . . but, for God's sake, take it far. This all too familiar air of murky mystery, anthropomorphic malevolence and even a sort of vague indecency attached by presentations of this kind: 1) natural and decidedly not "evil," if not popularly comprehended, phenomena; 2) scientific procedure (just bust it open, and damn the consequences—which are invariably dire); 3) scientists themselves (dedicated and unwary fools who rush in where the "practical realist" fears to tread) . . . this familiar and misleading air of hack melodrama is, we submit, another straw on the back of the weary camel that supports sane, comfortable and forward-looking thought in this technological age.

Why don't the TV bigwigs learn what science fiction is all about? It might pay off. After all, it sells more than two million magazines every month!

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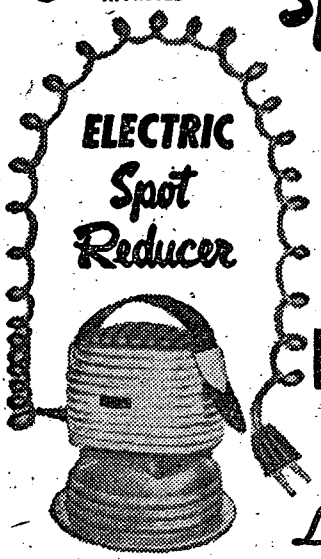

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MAIL THIS 10 DAY FREE TRIAL COUPON NOW!

TRY THE SPOT REDUCER 10 DAYS FREE IN YOUR OWN HOME!

Mail this coupon with only $1 for your Spot Reducer on approval. Pay postman $8.95 plus delivery—or send $9.95 (full price) and we ship postage prepaid. Use it for ten days in your own home. Then if not delighted return Spot Reducer for full purchase price refund. Don't delay! You have nothing to lose—except ugly, embarrassing, undesirable pounds of FAT. MAIL COUPON now!

ALSO USE IT FOR ACHES AND PAINS

CAN'T SLEEP

Relax with electric Spot Reducer. See how soothing its gentle massage can be. Helps you sleep when massage can be of benefit.

MUSCULAR ACHES:

A handy helper for transient relief of discomforts that can be aided by gentle, relaxing massage.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

USED BY EXPERTS

Thousands have lost weight this way—in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, necks, buttocks, etc. The same method used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The Spot Reducer can be used in your spare time, in the privacy of your own room.

ORDER IT TODAY

SENT ON APPROVAL—MAIL COUPON NOW!

SPOT REDUCER CO., Dept. B-129
1025 Broad St., Newark, New Jersey

Please send me the Spot Reducer for 10 days trial period. I enclose $1. Upon arrival I will pay postman only $8.95 plus postage and handling. If not delighted I may return SPOT REDUCER within 10 days for prompt refund of purchase price.

☐ I enclose $12.98. Send DeLuxe Model.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... *State* .....

☐ SAVE POSTAGE — check here if you enclose $9.95 with coupon. We pay all postage and handling charges. Same money back guarantee applies. ☐ I enclose $12.98. Send DeLuxe Model.

LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

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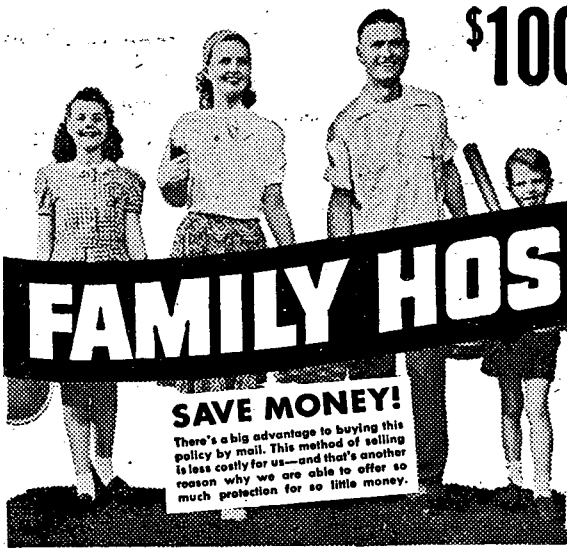
$100.00 A WEEK in CASH
PAID DIRECT TO YOU



FAMILY HOSPITAL PLAN

SAVE MONEY!
There's a big advantage to buying this policy by mail. This method of selling is less costly for us—and that's another reason why we are able to offer so much protection for so little money.

Policy Pays for a Day, a Week, a Month, a Year—*just as long as necessary for you to be hospitalized!*

JUST LOOK
The Large Benefit This Low Cost Policy Provides!

The Service Life Family Hospital Plan covers you and your family for about everything—for *every* accident, and for *all* common and rare diseases after the policy has been in force 30 days or more. Very serious disease such as cancer, tuberculosis, heart disease, diseases involving female organs, sickness resulting in a surgical operation, hernia, lumbago and sacroiliac conditions originating after the policy is in force six months are all covered . . . Hospitalization caused by attempted suicide, use of intoxicants or narcotics, insanity, and venereal disease is naturally excluded.

The money is all yours—for any purpose you want to use it. There are no hidden meanings or big words in the policy. We urge you and every family and also individuals to send for this policy on our 10 day free trial offer—and be convinced that no other hospital plan offers you so much for your $1.00 a month!

TWO SPECIAL FEATURES

MATERNITY
Benefits At Small Extra Cost
Women who will some day have babies will want to take advantage of a special low cost maternity rider. Pays $50.00 for childbirth confinement either in the hospital or at home, after policy has been in force 10 months. Double the amount on twins.

POLIO
Benefits At No Extra Cost
In lieu of other regular benefits policy pays these benefits if polio strikes—
For Hospital Bills, up to $500.00
For Doctor's Bills while in the hospital, up to $500.00
For Orthopedic Appliances, up to $500.00
TOTAL OF $1,500.00

3c A DAY IS ALL YOU PAY
for this outstanding new Family Protection

Wonderful news! This new policy covers everyone from infancy to age 70! When sickness or accident sends you or a member of your family to the hospital—this policy PAYS $100.00 PER WEEK for a day, a month, even a year . . . or just as long as you stay in the hospital. What a wonderful feeling to know your savings are protected and you won't have to go into debt. The money is paid DIRECT TO YOU to spend as you wish. This remarkable new Family Hospital Protection costs only 3c a day for each adult 18 to 59 years of age, and for age 60 to 70 only 4½c a day. This policy even covers children up to 18 years of age with cash benefits of $50.00 a week while in the hospital—yet the cost is only 1½c a day for each child! Benefits paid while confined to any recognized hospital, except government hospitals, rest homes and clinics, spas or sanitariums: Pick your own doctor. Naturally this wonderful policy is issued only to individuals and families now in good health; otherwise the cost would be sky high. But once protected, you are covered for about every sickness or accident. Persons covered may return as often as necessary to the hospital within the year.

This is What $100.00 a Week Can Mean to You When in the Hospital for Sickness or Accident

Money melts away fast when you or a member of your family has to go to the hospital. You have to pay costly hospital board and room . . . doctor's bills and maybe the surgeon's bill too . . . necessary medicines, operating room fees—a thousand and one things you don't count on. What a Godsend this READY CASH BENEFIT WILL BE TO YOU. Here's cash to go a long way toward paying heavy hospital expenses—and the money left over can help pay you for time lost from your job or business. Remember—all cash benefits are paid directly to you.

Examine This Policy Without Cost or Obligation—Read It—Talk It Over—Then Decide

10 DAYS FREE EXAMINATION

You are invited to inspect this new kind of Family Hospital Plan. We will send the actual policy to you for ten days at no cost or obligation. Talk it over with your banker, doctor, lawyer or spiritual adviser. Then make up your mind. This policy backed by the full resources of the nationally known Service Life Insurance Company of Omaha, Nebraska—organized under the laws of Nebraska and with policyholders in every state. SEND NO MONEY—just your name and address! No obligation, of course!

REMEMBER—$100.00 A WEEK CASH BENEFIT IS ACTUALLY $14.25 PER DAY!

FREE INSPECTION . . . MAIL COUPON
The Actual Policy Will Come to You at Once Without Cost or Obligation

The Service Life Insurance Company
Hospital Department K-17, Omaha 2, Nebraska
Please rush the new Family Hospital Protection Plan Policy to me on 10 days Free Inspection. I understand that I am under no obligation.

Name.....
Address.....
City or Town.....*State*.....

THE SERVICE LIFE FAMILY HOSPITAL PLAN

SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
Assets of $12,700,000 as of January 1, 1952
Hospital Department K-17, Omaha 2, Nebraska

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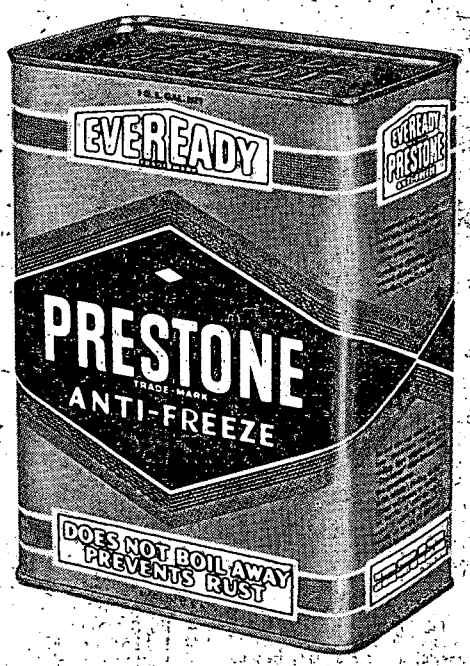
No other anti-freeze gives your car the same complete protection!



WITH PRESTONE BRAND ANTI-FREEZE

You're SET

Just put "Prestone" anti-freeze in and forget it till spring! No "boil-away" worries . . . no repair bills — its special inhibitors give the world's best protection against rust, clogging and foaming.

You're SAFE

High compression engines and car-heaters make non-evaporating anti-freeze more important now than ever. There's not one drop of boil-away alcohol or methanol in "Prestone" anti-freeze.

You're SURE

With "Prestone" brand anti-freeze in your car, you're sure you've bought the best. It's America's No. 1 brand. No other anti-freeze gives your car the same complete protection. It's guaranteed!

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY
A Division of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation
30 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N.Y.

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$3.75 PER GAL. | $1.00 PER QT. IN QUART CANS

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